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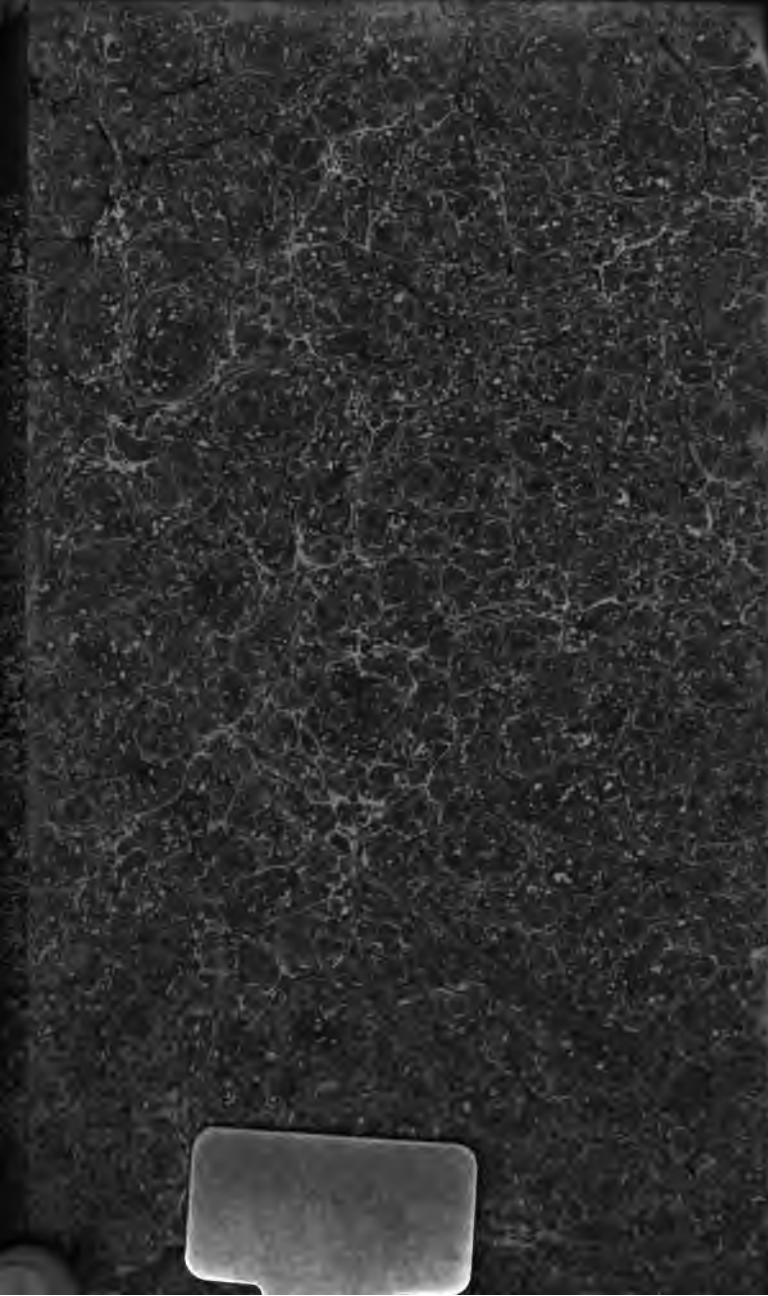

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SERMONS

FOR EVERY

SUNDAY AND FESTIVAL

OF THE YEAR.

Chiefly taken from the

SERMONS OF M. MASSILLON,

BISHOP OF CLERMONT.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD PEACH.

Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.—
Luke xi. 28.

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FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE GREAT DANGER OF FALLING INTO SIN, TO WHICH THE SOUL IS EXPOSED IN A STATE OF TEPIDITY.

Except your justice exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. v. 20.

WERE I to give a full and correct description of the moral and religious conduct of the men who are so severely censured by our Lord in the gospel of this Sunday, and compare it with the behaviour of

the generality of Christians of the present times, it would appear that hardly an individual is to be found among us, who can be said to equal, much less exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, though even this, we are admonished, would be far from being sufficient to entitle us to the possession of God's eternal kingdom. The character of this age is tepidity and remissness in the service of God. Men form to themselves a system of religious worship, which consists of little more than a listless attendance at the public service. They hear the word of God: read over their usual prayers; but neither practise what they hear, nor attend with proper devotion to what they read. Their piety, like that of the Pharisees, is mostly external. If they avoid criminal excesses, they conclude that their salvation is not endangered. Although they entertain no sincere love for God, although they

feel no horror for sin, and although they indulge their passions in smaller things without scruple or remorse, they imagine that the grace of God will be always at their command; and that they will be preserved in the hour of danger from that which they hate only on account of the eternal torments to which it will expose them.

But, my beloved, were we fully sensible of our weakness, and of our total dependance on God; and were we thoroughly convinced that grace is not to be obtained but by fervent prayer, and by earnest desires of leading a truly christian life, we should clearly perceive that tepidity, remissness, and negligence in the service of God will infallibly expose the soul, at some future moment, to the danger of being overwhelmed in the time of temptation, and deprived of that extraordinary grace, on the possession of which her security depends.

1. It is a fundamental article in our belief, that even those who are the most perfect, stand in continual need of the assistance of divine grace. Our nature is not what it was originally. A sad and deplorable alteration has taken place since the time when man was created in innocence. Little remains of her original strength and vigour. Her understanding is clouded with ignorance; and her will is depraved by the sensual appetite: equity and truth are no longer her inheritance: all her inclinations are in opposition to the will of God, she is dragged on, as it were, without any formal consent on her part, towards illicit enjoyments. The obedience and love, which are due to the law of God, cannot engage her attention, unless she use continual violence to obliterate the impressions caused by visible things, unless she resist her most lively desires, and unless she fight incessantly against herself. Every duty

prescribed by the gospel is painful to flesh and blood: every command restrains some one or other of her propensities: every step in the way of virtue is taken with labour and difficulty.

In such a state as this, how arduous is the task of obedience! and how easy is it to transgress! To this weight of corruption may be added the snares with which she is beset on every side —the allurements of public example— the enervating influence of visible objects—the danger of being surprised in an unguarded moment—the trials which are occasioned by afflictions and injuries—and, in a word, the innumerable temptations with which she is constantly assailed during the whole course of her mortal life.

To these might be added the details of her own private weaknesses, and the peculiar aversion to the laws of piety and truth which she has contracted by her former irregularities — that in-

creased love of the world and its vanities — that distaste for prayer and religious exercises—that additional influence of the sensual powers—that insuperable sloth which is pained by every spiritual duty, and which is dismayed by every difficulty — that haughty spirit, which is neither to be bent nor broken — that inconstancy of mind, which is always eager for change, which is wearied by a repetition of the same duties, which is an enemy to uniformity of life and conversation, which, like the foolish man in the gospel, wills and wills not, and which frequently hurries the soul from one extreme to another, from excessive sadness to the most puerile mirth, and causes her to violate the strongest resolutions the moment after they were formed.

In the midst of such dangers, and surrounded by such powerful enemies, what will be the strength even of the strongest person imaginable when left

entirely to his own feeble exertions? Will he be able to stand, unprotected and alone? Will he be able to fight the good fight, and to resist the united attacks of the devil, of the world, and of his own inordinate passions? No: my beloved, his only security is in the grace and protection of the Lord of Hosts: it is he that must enlighten him in the shades of darkness: it is he that must support him in the hour of conflict; that must restrain the impetuosity of self-love, and that must shield him from the envenomed shafts of his powerful and inveterate enemies. If he be left to himself, even for one instant, he will fall a victim to their malice: if he be not constantly upheld by that all-powerful hand, he will be borne down by the torrent that opposes him.—Our continuance, therefore, in the paths of virtue, is the effect of divine grace: every step that we take in the ways of God is in con-

sequence of the motions of the Holy Spirit: and every good work that we perform owes its commencement and perfection to the mercies of God. Such is the weakness of man; and such is his dependance on the protection of his Maker. The grace of God is not only the reward of his fidelity, but it is the primary cause of his fidelity: grace is his strength; and the exertion of his strength is the only means of obtaining an increase of grace.

In fact, my beloved, is it not agreeable to the principles of equity that some order should be observed by Providence in the distribution of his spiritual gifts? And what order is it that justice prescribes? No other than that the Lord should communicate himself more abundantly to his creature in proportion to the zeal and fervour which he has manifested in his service: that he should afford a more

constant protection, and shower down more abundant mercies on him who has given greater proofs of fidelity and love; and that he should bestow on him a reward proportioned to the profits which he had acquired by the talents entrusted to him. On the other hand, that he should be cold and reserved towards the unfaithful servant who is tepid and negligent in his service; and that he should turn away with disgust from the man who presents no other offering to him than what is calculated to excite his abhorrence. This is the order prescribed by justice; and this is the order observed by Providence. We no sooner become cool and languid in his service, than he treats us with the same indifference: we no sooner begin to confine our fidelity to those essential duties which cannot be neglected without manifestly incurring the guilt of sin, than he begins to prescribe bounds to his mercies,

and to impart to us only those general graces which he bestows promiscuously on all. He recedes from us in proportion as we recede from him: and he is favourable and beneficent to us in proportion as we are faithful to him.

This treatment on the part of God is founded, I again repeat, on principles of the strictest justice; and a little reflection on the general tenor of our conduct will shew, that such treatment as this, is, in fact, all that we have a right to look to. For, how do we proceed? Why, we enter into judgment with our Lord; we sum up the several items of the debt we owe him; and knowing the consequences which must necessarily result from any deficiency on our part, are punctual in our payments, but never generous: our care is never to exceed. We seem to adopt, in our intercourse with God, (but with less justice) the language of the lord of the vineyard: "Friend,

" take what is thine, and go thy way :
" didst thou not agree with me for a
" penny a day ?"——It is impossible to think that, when we have been thus ungenerous to God, the return which he will make to us in the distribution of his favours, will not be regulated on a principle that is nearly, if not equally, similar. It is not by restricting our endeavours in this partial and parsimonious manner to the mere outline of our duty, that we can ever hope to gain any ascendency in the divine favour. The friendship of the Great Creator is not to be purchased at so low a rate. No : the price of love is love. If we love God, he will love us : otherwise he will reject, he will repudiate us. How far this great and invigorating principle of divine love is necessary for our steady advancement in the way of virtue, will be best ascertained by fixing your attention, for a moment, on the evil consequences

which must always ensue from the cold indifference of those who are habitually in want of it.

The first great and lamentable evil that presents itself to our view, as the natural effect of this unhappy disposition, is, that it deprives the soul of the best, if not the only means of her defence, by cutting off all the more abundant supplies of divine grace, and leaving her without any other aid than what may be found in the ordinary helps and resources, which the providence of God still continues to hold out in favour of those who have not, as yet, entirely abandoned him.——I am far from disputing the superior efficacy of divine grace, even in the lowest measure of its distribution. I know that it is sufficient: but I contend that there must be some correspondent endeavours on our part: and where these endeavours are wanting, as, to a certainty, they will be wanting in a

state of coolness and indifference, the effect which it will produce will be next to nothing. Much exertion will be necessary to regain the station which we had lost; and without this exertion we cannot be reinstated in it. In the beginning, indeed, our condition will not be so bad. We may, at first, retain a due sense of modesty, and of the fear of God: we may, perhaps, tremble at the idea of leading a wicked life; and by means of these considerations be enabled to fight for some time against our spiritual enemies. But these are only the efforts of weak nature, and will not continue long. Grace will daily have less effect on our minds: our faith will be weakened, and our charity will be cooled: our horror of sin will be diminished, and our love of the world will be increased: temptations will become more violent, and our means of defence will be lessened: between us and sin there will be

no other barrier than our own infirmity.——What will follow from such a state as this, may be easily foreseen.

Secondly, to him who is habitually tepid, the yoke of the Lord cannot fail of appearing, at all times, heavy and insupportable. In the present condition of our fallen nature, we look in vain for that warm sense of rectitude in the mind of man, those supereminent principles of truth and equity, with which he was constitutionally gifted in the days of his primeval innocence. All that was formerly so great and good within him, is now sunk in the gratification of his inordinate and sensual appetite. Religion, which enjoins the surrender of present ease, as the appointed means of arriving at future happiness,—religion is irksome and tedious to him: he feels the restraint which it occasionally lays him under: he feels the violence of the passions, which agitate him with-

in; and is tired and tormented with the unequal contest. In such a state as this, if the God of all consolation does not stoop to visit and raise him up; if no interior comforts are made to spring up in his mind, to console him in his afflictions, and cheer him on in the arduous conflict that is set before him, how is he to be supported? how is he to come off with victory? Can such a thing be rationally expected? No: my beloved, it cannot.

Now, the tepid Christian is a stranger to these consolations, and consequently he is weighed down by the pressure of the yoke which is laid upon him. He performs all the works of piety with reluctance and disgust, because he is not in a proper disposition to relish them. He is obliged to offer continual violence to himself, because his repeated infidelities will not suffer him to taste the sweets of divine love. The most trivial self-denial or act of

penance he performs with much difficulty and labour. He is not comforted by prayer: he is not exhilarated by retirement: his whole life is spent in a continued opposition to his inclinations and desires: he is on one side disgusted with the manna which the Lord commands him to eat; and on the other, he longs for, but dares not return to the flesh-pots of Egypt, lest the Lord should inflict on him the heavy judgments which his apostacy would deserve.

Such a state of constraint as this is, cannot be endured long: if piety does not impart tranquillity and delight to the mind, it will soon be thrown off. So irksome a thing it is, and so very odious, to stop short in our plans, and to end in deciding nothing; to be neither a sinner nor a saint; neither a follower of the world, nor a disciple of Christ; neither a man of pleasure, nor a child of grace; that it is impossible

such a state as this can last. Sooner or later it will have an end; and, generally speaking, it will end in ruin. The human heart must have some determinate object to interest and occupy its attention: if this object be not God, it will soon be the world: it must have sentimental enjoyment of one kind or other: it must have pleasure; and if that pleasure be not derived from piety, it will be sought after in the haunts of wickedness.

I am not ignorant that there are many Christians who seem to linger on for a length of time in the state of spiritual indolence and tepidity; who have no ardour either for the world or for God: who, in the midst of sensual gratifications, seem to retain a regularity and uprightness of sentiment which has the appearance of virtue; and in the midst of their religious duties, seem to be actuated by those lax

and tepid principles which savour of the world and its maxims.

I am not ignorant that there are many among Christians of this description: nor am I ignorant (nor do I, indeed, wish that any of you should remain ignorant) that such Christians as these are virtuous only externally; every other way they are as thoroughly depraved as the worst of those who are libertines by profession. Their virtue consists in a prudent, circumspect behaviour in all matters of signal delinquency. They are careful not to commit themselves by any overt act of glaring licentiousness; at the same time that they do not scruple to defile their souls with the guilt of the concealed passions of jealousy, hatred, pride, vanity, and self-love: so that, in fact, their piety is nothing more than a care to avoid those grievous transgressions which will injure their

reputation, and destroy their peace of mind; and their pretended regularity is nothing better than indolence, the offspring of self-love.

I know, likewise, that the most virtuous Christians are not unfrequently deprived of that holy unction and delight which smoothen the paths of holiness. But there are three essential points in which the just man, who enjoys not the consolations of piety, differs from the tepid and worldly Christian, who is oppressed by the yoke, and who experiences no delight in the service of God.

First, the pious Christian, in the midst of his spiritual dryness, is comforted by the testimony of a good conscience, and would not exchange that inward and pleasing satisfaction for all the delights which the world could give. The tepid Christian, on the contrary, who experiences no sensible consolations in piety, considers

the world as the most plentiful source of enjoyment; he fixes his affections on it, and he vainly supposes that this alone will be able to compensate him for the trouble and uneasiness which he incessantly undergoes in the performance of his religious duties.

Secondly, the pious Christian is upheld and encouraged in his afflictions by the tranquillity of mind which he enjoys, and which assures him that all is well between him and God. The tepid Christian, on the contrary, carries within him a conscience wounded and lacerated by the many failings which he continues to indulge: and it too generally happens that, experiencing no delight in virtue, he at length seeks his consolation in the ways of sin.

Thirdly, the desolation and spiritual aridity of the just man is a trial sent by God for the exercise of his patience: that of the tepid Christian, is a punish-

ment from the same hand. The one experiences in God the love of the most tender Father, and instead of sensible consolations, receives from his hands a more abundant supply of grace, and is favoured with a more powerful protection in the hour of temptation ;—the other experiences in God the severity of a Judge, and he is punished for his tepidity, not only by the substraction of sensible delights, but by the terrors of a guilty conscience, and the dread of incurring that sentence of condemnation which will be hereafter pronounced upon the impenitent.

These, my beloved, are the inevitable consequences of tepidity. Let it not, therefore, be said that it is imprudent to embrace an austere rule of life, —that intemperate zeal is of short continuance,—or that it is better to proceed by degrees, than to expose ourselves to the danger of expending our

strength by advancing too hastily in the beginning.

I acknowledge that the spirit of God is a spirit of discretion and wisdom, and that he does not encourage extremes, not even in piety. But I am authorized by the gospel to declare that you must dedicate yourselves to him without reserve: I am authorized to declare that, in order to be faithful in the more essential duties, you must incessantly labour to subdue every passion; and that if you favour any one of them, let your motive be prudence or what it may, you are digging a pit for your own ruin. Those fervent Christians alone, who not only avoid sin, but even the occasions of sin, proceed on in the paths of virtue with an uniform and steady step, and persevere faithfully to the end: and those tepid Christians only, who prescribe limits to their piety, and who mingle the pleasures of the world and of religion

together, relapse into their former ways, and dishonour piety by the inconstancy of their lives.

It is not, therefore, by dedicating ourselves to God wholly and entirely, that a distaste for piety is acquired, but by serving him with negligence. Complete victory is to be obtained, not by sparing the enemy, but by pursuing him with vigour and dispatch. A surprise is to be avoided, not by sleeping in indolence and sloth, but by a regular attention to every part of our conduct. To be afraid of undertaking too much, lest we should not be able to continue on with it, is a vain apprehension. The only method of ensuring the grace of perseverance, is to begin in such a manner as to leave nothing to be done hereafter. What an illusion is it, my beloved, to avoid zeal as if it were the bane of perseverance, when it is zeal alone that can ensure it: to adopt an easy and tepid

mode of life, as if it were the only sure way of preventing a relapse, when it is this mode of life that leads most inevitably to it: and to neglect the less important duties of religion, as if they were prejudicial to piety, when piety without these observances is exposed to the most imminent danger.

Knowing, therefore, my beloved, the extreme hazard to which the soul is exposed in a state of tepidity; knowing the disastrous consequences which will inevitably result from it; knowing that it will remove from us the special graces of heaven, and that it will reduce us to a state of weakness and apathy, in which the first breath of temptation that comes will be too strong for any resistance that we may then have it in our power to make; let us seriously consider how much it behoves us to be constantly on our guard against the slightest encroachment of so powerful and dangerous an

enemy.——Be you, therefore, steadfast in the way of truth, and be not led astray by the dictates of worldly prudence. The love of God must inflame the whole soul. Your salvation is exposed to greater danger in the state of tepidity, than in any other. Be convinced that it is your duty to love and serve God as perfectly as you can, and then his grace will assist and protect you in the midst of temptations, and convey you safe through the dangerous ocean of the world, to that happy port which we all desire to enter.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON MAKING LIGHT OF VENIAL OFFENCES.

For in that he died to sin, he died once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. . . . . . Rom. vi. 10.

THIS, my beloved, is the glorious example which is held forth for our imitation by the apostle in the epistle of this Sunday. Our Lord died once only to sin: he then cast off the appendages of mortality, forsook the regions of death, and returned to a life of perfect holiness and justice: *he liveth only to God.* Here is our model,

Our death to sin must be perfect and permanent: sin must no more have dominion over us: our defiled garments must be washed from every stain; and we must now live to God alone.

This is a maxim which calls particularly for your attentive consideration. Every Christian, indeed, will acknowledge that, after having made his reconciliation with God by sincere repentance, it is his duty to watch over the motions of his soul, and to fall no more into the abyss of mortal sin. But this is not the whole extent of our duty: we must live to God: we must enter into the paths of perfect holiness and justice: we must labour to subdue even the most trivial failings: and we must be resolved to avoid, as far as human weakness will permit, the least venial sin.

This is our duty: fidelity to this is an essential point of christian piety.

This it was that exalted the saints to the pinnacle of perfection, and merited for them the crown of immortality: and this it is that is to obtain for us the grace of perseverance, and to lead us to heaven. To many this doctrine will appear severe and discouraging. The generality of Christians fear nothing but mortal sin; as if, because this is the only evil which can condemn them to everlasting punishment, this were the only obstacle to salvation; as if no danger was to be apprehended from any of the intermediate steps which lead to ruin. But I will prove in this discourse, that no sin ought to appear light and trivial in the eyes of the true Christian, and that indifference about venial sins leads to the worst of consequences.

1. Were we duly impressed with the sublime ideas of the awful majesty of God, which faith unfolds to our view, it would not be necessary to enter into

a justification of his holy law, or to attempt to prove that no offence committed against him can be properly called trivial and insignificant. The sanctity and the excellence of his divine nature, when contrasted with the abyss of our nothingness, is so infinite, that the malice which is contained in the smallest sin is far beyond the powers of human comprehension. This may be collected from the severe judgments with which he visited the venial transgressions of his chosen people in former times. A few sticks collected on the day of rest for purposes of necessity, was deemed a violation of the Sabbath, and a crime worthy of death. A trifling jealousy, a slight murmur drew down the severe affliction of leprosy on the sister of the great lawgiver of Israel. A simple act of diffidence in the promises of God, under a very peculiar embarrassment, was the crime for which Moses himself was

excluded from the land of promise; and the only mitigation of the sentence, which his known excellence and his familiar intercourse with God were able to procure him, was the favour of beholding it at a distance before his death. In a word, the retaining of a very small portion of the spoils of Jericho for private use, contrary to the express command of God, was the reason why the whole army of Israel was delivered up to the sword of its enemies; and the unhappy Achan was judged guilty of a crime which could be expiated only by his blood.

Could we, my beloved friends, by these or any other considerations, be brought to think soberly; could we be made thoroughly sensible of the majesty of God, how should we shudder at the thought of any offence committed against him, even of such as are set down as light and trivial! Were the full penalty, which is annexed

even to the slightest of these offences, clearly presented to our view, how should we tremble for ourselves, how gladly should we embrace every opportunity of commuting it, even at the expence of every thing that is most dear, by the voluntary surrender of all that we here most cherish and admire !—Still I admit there is a great distinction to be made between the comparative guilt of venial and mortal sin. Indeed there can be no proportion between them; or it is that proportion only which is to be found between a temporary suspension of health and the utter extinction of our mortal existence. The one enfeebles the soul, the other destroys it. The one contristates the Holy Spirit that is still within us; the other leaves nothing in the soul, but what excites in the mind of the Deity a just sentiment of hatred and abhorrence. Yet, notwithstanding there is this difference between

them, still it must be said that the slightest act of infidelity is an insult offered to the Lord, a formal preference given to the creature before the Creator. And can an insult of this description, offered to a God so great, so holy, so worthy of our homage, be considered as trifling; especially if we reflect that it is not in the power of human nature to atone for it, and that its guilt would never have been removed, had not the Son of God himself offered up the sacrifice of his own blood for its expiation?

But I will not enlarge on the enormity of venial sin considered as it is in itself: I will pass on to other reflections. I shall consider the dispositions of him who is habitually guilty of venial offences, and I will prove that those dispositions are injurious to the honour of God, and prejudicial to salvation.

First, the man who is solicitous

only to avoid mortal sin, and indulges without scruple in the daily commission of lesser faults, acts in direct opposition to a positive command of God. Be ye perfect, says our Lord, as your heavenly Father is perfect. This is a formal precept. The degree of perfection, indeed, to which we are to attain, is not specified; but it obliges all to aim at perfection, and to labour to become perfect; and as there is nothing which proves a greater obstacle to our advancement towards perfection, than a constant habit of venial offences, it imposes the obligation of avoiding them with care and diligence. The man, therefore, who falls into venial sin without scruple, and without any intention of amendment, is guilty of a positive infraction of this precept, and exposes his salvation to great and imminent danger.

Secondly, the reason why so little account is made of venial sin, is be-

cause it is not deserving of eternal punisment. Now, what is to be deduced from this? That the man, who is actuated by this reason, is no better than a slave and an hireling; that he is awed into obedience only by the fear of punishment; that he is ready and willing to transgress the law of God in all its more weighty points, as well as in those that are of less importance, were he not deterred by the fear of everlasting punishment; that his fidelity hitherto has been excited, not by the love of justice, or by the desire of promoting the glory of God, but by self-love, and by the dread of the scourge which was held over him. On occasions when the glory of the Lord is the only thing that is essentially concerned, you will generally find that such a person as this will not be very fearful of offending his Maker. On the contrary, he will attempt to justify his conduct, by alledging that

he has not forfeited the friendship of God, nor destroyed the life of his soul. In the discernment of good and evil, he consulted only his own honour and advantage: his fidelity was regulated by his own interest. Is this, my beloved, the disposition of a soul that truly loves God? or rather, is not such a disposition highly criminal, and injurious to the honour of the Supreme Being? True charity seeketh not its own in this manner. No, my beloved: we act not thus even in human friendships. The man who entertains a sincere affection for another, does not consider how far he may insult him without forfeiting his esteem; he avoids every species of affront; he behaves with due civility and decorum at all times; and if on any occasion an unintentional offence be given, he is eager to enter into an explanation, and to exculpate himself. Thus it is in human friendships: and is God to

be treated with less ceremony than one of our fellow-creatures? Is it a crime of no consequence, to consult how far we may offend *him* without forfeiting his friendship? We cannot say it. And yet we enquire whether it be a mortal or venial sin to defame the character of our neighbour, to excuse ourselves by an untruth, to be over-solicitous about our temporal welfare, to be impatient under trials and afflictions? We do not ask whether these things are displeasing to God, for we are already assured of this; but whether they are mortal sins? whether they are crimes that deserve eternal torments? This is the only object of our solicitude: this alone influences our conduct. Oh! we must be convinced that these inquiries do not proceed from the love of God, but from the love of ourselves: we must be convinced that we do not hate sin on account of the chief reason why it should be hated, namely, its op-

position to the sanctity of the Supreme Being, and that we do not serve God with sincerity and truth. If these, therefore, be our dispositions, our piety is nothing more than the fear of punishment: we are faithful in great things, because we are awed into respect by the severe threats which are denounced in the gospel against the unhappy prevaricators: we are like the unfaithful servant, we hide our talent, because we dread the severity of our Master; and were it not for this dread, we should squander it away in trifles and vain amusements: in the dispositions of our hearts,—the only dispositions which the Lord considers,—who will tell us that we are not children of death, and avowed transgressors of the law?

Thirdly, the deliberate contempt of small faults, even without referring to the dispositions with which we may be animated, exposes us to the most im-

-minent danger of stepping beyond the fatal limits, and falling into the deep abyss of mortal sin. Who can assure us that those continual endeavours to please ourselves, that this eagerness to flatter our senses, and to avoid every constraint, though at the expence of some or other of our lesser duties, are not something more than venial sins? Who can assure us that self-love does not, on those occasions, so far predominate, as to exercise perfect dominion over our souls, to the exclusion of divine charity? Who can say that, on those occasions when the demon of impurity holds before our unguarded imagination his delusive phantoms, we do not take too much complacency in them, or that our resistance is sufficiently speedy and vigorous? Who can decide positively, that those antipathies and dislikes, which we entertain without scruple, do not amount to the guilt of hatred? Who knows whether

that sensibility, that impatience under the pains, or losses, or contradictions which we feel, is not indulged to such a length as to incur the guilt of a criminal opposition to the orders of Providence? Who can determine whether that anxious solicitude to improve our fortune, that love of dress, and those endeavours to heighten the beauty of our persons, are not pursued with such ardour as to involve us in the crime of ambition, of avarice, or of wanton vanity? or whether that nice attention to the delicacies of the table, and that assiduity in flattering the sensual appetite, is not accompanied with such pleasure, beyond the bounds of necessity, as to lead us into the sin of intemperance?

Great God! how is it possible for man to trace the increase, or the insensible diminution of thy grace in the soul? Who has ever discovered the fatal boundaries of life and death?

Who can weigh the guilt of sin, and determine which is mortal, and which is venial? A little less, or a little more complacency; a consent of the heart more deliberate, or more unguarded; an act of the will more or less complete; an omission, in which there is more or less contempt; a thought consented to with deliberation not sufficient to cause the guilt of mortal sin, or a little beyond the limits; ah! who can determine these points! It is not human wisdom that can do it. They are secrets, which ought to strike us with terror: they are secrets, which will not be disclosed until the great day of vengeance arrive. And yet we live on unconcerned, in a state in which, perhaps, every sin that we consider as venial, is a mortal crime in the eyes of God!

The greatest saints, whose consciences did not convict them of sin; who chastised their bodies, and re-

duced them into subjection; who maintained a constant watchfulness over themselves, and were careful to resist the first motions of temptation; who abstained even from lawful pleasures, when they apprehended that scandal would be given to their neighbour by indulging in them; who worked out their salvation with continual fear and trembling; these men, I say, were terrified at the idea of the uncertainty I am alluding to, and declared that they knew not whether they were worthy of love or hatred. Is it possible then, that the man who is solicitous only to avoid what are evidently mortal sins; who is unfaithful in lesser things without scruple; who is in imminent danger every instant of stepping beyond the mark; who cannot determine, whether in any of these sins he has actually stepped beyond it or not; is it possible that he should flatter himself with the idea that he

possesses the precious gift of charity, that he is the friend of God, and that he is entitled to an eternal reward? Suffer not yourselves to be deluded: examine the reasonableness of your hopes, and be your own judges.

Fourthly, although it must be acknowledged that all sins are not mortal; and that some are properly said only to contristate the Holy Spirit, while others are known to banish him entirely from the soul; yet the rules by which they are to be distinguished from each other, can neither be positive nor general in their application to particular cases. The enormity and the malice of sin can only be determined by the dispositions of the heart: the same sin is sometimes venial and sometimes mortal: venial, when it does not proceed from any deliberate malice, as, indeed, it seldom does in minds that are turned to piety; mortal, when committed by the sinner through the

corruption and depravity of his heart. Josue and Saul were both guilty of disobedience to the commands of God; the one spared the Gabaonites, the other, the Amalecites; but as Josue sinned only through surprise, his offence was venial; whereas Saul was actuated by pride and obstinacy; he rebelled against the command of God with full deliberation; and, therefore, his sin was so enormous in the sight of God, as to draw down upon him the sentence of reprobation.

Now, my beloved, if this truth be incontestable, what reason have you to suppose that your infidelities are only venial sins? Are you acquainted with the corruption of your own heart to its full extent? The Lord alone, who is its searcher and its judge, is fully acquainted with it; and his eyes are very different from those of men. But if it be allowable to form a judgment beforehand, tell me, whether that fund of ha-

bitual indolence and tepidity; that voluntary perseverance in a state which is displeasing to God; that deliberate contempt of duties, merely because they are not considered as essential; that resolution of doing nothing more for God, than what is merely requisite to avoid his severest judgments; tell me, whether this can be considered in his sight as the proper state of a Christian? and whether the faults proceeding from such a corrupted source can with justice be called trivial, and deserving of indulgence? My God! what secrets wilt Thou disclose when Thou comest to judge justice, and to expose the interior recesses of our hearts!

Fifthly, true charity cannot reside in the soul without manifesting itself exteriorly. It has been likened to a tree growing within us, the roots of which lie concealed in our hearts, while its branches are visible to all, and its goodness can only be known by its

fruits. Now the first characteristic of this charity is a propensity to exaggerate every fault, and to attach a degree of criminality even to those actions, which, in the sight of God, are the mere effects of human weakness. The saints were animated by it; they treated themselves as sinners unworthy of the mercies of the Lord, and placed themselves, in their own estimation, below the last of their fellow-creatures; and can the same divine charity, with which you suppose that you are animated even in the midst of your tepidity and languor, prompt you to think so very differently of your failings, and diminish their enormity in your eyes? No, my beloved, charity is not so inconsistent with itself.

The second characteristic of divine charity is humility, joined with diffidence and timidity. It causes the soul to work out her salvation with fear and trembling: it causes her to

endure a martyrdom of love, through the anxiety and dread which are continually upon her from the uncertainty of the state in which she now is in the sight of God. This has always been the charity of the saints.—Now, the charity on which you rely, when you make little account of venial sins, is tranquil, indolent, and presumptuous: it excludes almost every symptom of fear from your hearts; it places you in a state of unsuspecting security and peace: it induces you to believe that you are rich, and stand in need of nothing. —But, my beloved, can the same charity produce such opposite effects? No, to a certainty, it cannot: either your charity, or the charity of the saints must be counterfeit. Which of the two is most deserving of such a censure, must be left to your own judgment to determine.

Lastly, charity is always in motion: it cannot remain idle in the soul: it is a heavenly fire, which is never altogether

inactive. It may not always, indeed, burn with so bright a flame, and may possibly appear to be, for a time, overpowered by involuntary failings: but these will not extinguish it: in time it will be sure to burst forth again; prayer and the sacraments will restore it to its former vigour, and pious reading and meditation will not fail to rekindle its ardour, and fan it into as bright a flame as ever. It is written in the second book of Machabees, that the sacred fire, which had been buried by the Jews in the earth during their captivity, was found at their return, covered over with a thick moss, and seemingly extinct; but that it was no sooner exposed to the rays of the sun, than it burst into a flame, to the great astonishment of the whole multitude of the Israelites who were present. The same effect is witnessed after the temporary lukewarmness of the just man. When the sacred fire of charity

is abated in his breast, and seems to be extinguished by the failings into which he has been seduced by human weakness, it is immediately rekindled and excited into a flame, when he approaches to the sacred banquet, when he hears the truths of salvation, and when Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice, darts on him the rays of his heavenly grace. Then it is that his heart is inflamed, that his fervour is renewed, and that his whole soul is impatient to give testimony of her love, by a more scrupulous attention to every duty. Thus it is with the just man when he feels a temporary diminution of his primitive fervour. But, my beloved, is it the same with you?—you, I mean, who make no account of venial sin? May it not be said with truth, that your zeal, that your fervour is never excited into a flame? that the sacraments, which you frequent, cause no diminution of your tepidity? that the seed

of God's word falls upon your souls, as upon a barren rock, and produces no other fruit than a few transient desires, without any effective resolutions of amendment? that you are the same to-day as you were yesterday? and that you neither attempt, nor desire to advance in perfection beyond your present state? Oh! if this may be said of you, I am afraid that the fire of charity is extinguished in your souls, and that you are dead in the sight of God. It is not my wish, nor my intention, to destroy your peace of mind: but I am obliged to declare that no dependance is to be placed on such a state; and that, judging by every rule of faith, there is reason to believe that you are more worthy of hatred than of love.

Be, therefore, on your guard: suffer not yourselves to be lulled into a false security by the idea that your transgressions are only venial, because it is not in your power to form a just de-

cision on this subject. Whatever your failings may be, you must lament them, and endeavour to correct them.—If you do this, although human nature will never be exempt from imperfections, your charity will be inflamed; you will advance in the paths of perfection; and, in the end, you will be acceptable in the eyes of the great Lord and Master of your souls.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE DEATH OF THE SINNER.

For the wages of sin are death; but the grace of God everlasting life.
Rom. vi. 23.

THERE is always some point of view or other, in which the human passions appear astonishing and incomprehensible. All men desire to live; and all men dread the idea of death, as the greatest of misfortunes: they are all solicitous to extend the limits of life; and they all seem to live, as if their only desire was to hasten the

close of their existence. It is the same in spiritual things as in temporal. They all flatter themselves that they shall die the death of the just.—They look upon the death of the obstinate and unrepenting sinner, as a calamity by far the most dreadful of any that can possibly happen to them; and yet with all the coolness and unconcern imaginable, they go on cheerfully, or in a way, in which it is, morally speaking, impossible to escape it. That terrible conclusion of life—final impenitence, fills them with dismay; and yet they run on with feasting and merriment in a path which they are fully apprised will certainly lead them to it. It is in vain that we declare, that as a man lives so will he die: they will neither renounce the ways of sin, nor relinquish the expectation of a happy life.

It is my intention on this day, not to display before your eyes the folly and danger of this fatal illusion, for

this I shall make the subject of a future discourse; but, since the death of the just appears so desirable, and the death of the sinner so terrible, I will describe them both; and endeavour to awaken your fears and desires, by the terrors of the one, and the consolations of the other. In both there will be ample matter for your consideration. In the portrait of the dying sinner you will behold the awful close of a life of vanity and pleasure; and in that of the dying saint, the serene and placid tranquillity which is diffused over the mind by virtue and piety. The description of the one will inspire you with a holy eagerness to live the life of the just; and the description of the other will instil into your hearts a horror for sin, and a sincere detestation of the ways of iniquity. Be attentive: for either the one or the other will be your lot. As the subject is too copious for one discourse, I will describe the

death of the sinner on this day; and reserve the other for the following Sunday.

1. I have already remarked to you, that you will either die the death of the sinner, or the death of the just. There is no other alternative. Were you blest with all that this world can afford; were the term of your mortal existence extended beyond the utmost limits of your wishes; nevertheless the day will come when you will be summoned into eternity: and then you will either die in your sins, or you will sleep happily in the Lord. In order that you may be induced to avert by works of penance this most dreadful of all evils, come with me to the bed-side of the dying sinner, and let us contemplate together the anguish and despair which overwhelm his soul at the awful moment of dissolution.

Behold him stretched on the bed of death. The world to him is no more;

its vanities, its pleasures, its hopes, its expectations make no impression on his mind: he has done with them: his thoughts are now otherwise engaged: he is contemplating the tenor of his past life; he is reflecting on his present unhappy state; and looking forward to the state which awaits him hereafter. —Let us follow him in the course of his reflections, and endeavour to profit by his experience.

He looks back upon his past life: but what consolation does it afford? It now appears to have been nothing but a dream: he seems to be, as it were, awakened from sleep, and finds nothing in his hands. He looks around him in vain, to discover the fruits of his past labours: he perceives that the world, whose smiles he had courted with such earnestness, is flying from him:—that the riches which he had acquired with such difficulty, and on which his affections were so ardently fixed, are now

slipping out of his hands:—that his reputation and name, on which he had prided himself, will not attend him to the tribunal of God, but will only serve to decorate his tomb. Ah! with what anguish does he reflect, that he has laboured all his life time, and done nothing for himself: that he has endured mortifications without number, and advanced not a step towards heaven. He foolishly supposed that the service of God was above his strength; and at the same time he displayed the courage of a martyr in the pursuit of a world which he is now obliged to quit. How does he lament his blindness and folly! With what surprise does he view the immense void which appears in his life! With what despair does he reflect that he has not, even yet, begun to live for God; and that out of so many actions, so many labours, there is not one that deserves to be recorded in the great book of eter-

nity! Oh! listen to his exclamations: "What!" he exclaims with a faultering voice, "what! have I hitherto lived only for vanity! Could I not have done as much for God, as I have done for the world! Was it fitting that I should have taken such pains, and struggled as I have done, with so much trouble and vexation, only to lose my soul! I have suffered more to gain hell, than would have been required to gain heaven. I supposed that the life of the just man was wretched and insupportable; and behold, mine was infinitely more wretched, and entitled to no reward."

Yes, my beloved: at that awful moment we shall behold things in a very different light from what we now do. The illusion will then be removed: the cloud will be dispersed, and we shall clearly see that the works of piety and religion are more estimable by far, than

the most brilliant exploits which the world holds up to the admiration of its deluded followers.

In addition to the anguish which arises from the vanity of his past labours, he is agitated by the recollection of his former pleasures — pleasures, which lasted only for a moment, and for which he has sacrificed his God and his All. Alas! he thought the term of life too long to be wholly devoted to the service of God: the series of years, which he supposed he had to live, appeared like an immense plain, over the whole of which he deliberately resolved not to carry his cross. He imagined that if he returned to God in the last stage of life, there could be no doubt of his finding a ready asylum in his bounty. He now sees with astonishment that the longest life is no more than an instant; that it is only one step, as it were, from the mother's

womb to the grave; and that, to devote any part of that short space to empty pleasures, is the height of folly.

This reflection is accompanied with the excruciating remembrance of his crimes, the guilt of which will adhere to him for ever. During the time of health he never took a serious review of his conscience: how matters stood between him and God was a subject that never occupied his attention. But now the dark abyss is enlightened. The weaknesses of youth, the licentiousness of manhood, the passions of more advanced age, all stare him in the face. Heaven and earth, says Job, conspire against him, and present before his distracted imagination the dreadful catalogue of his irregularities and crimes.

These are the tortures which the sinner endures from the recollection of the past: what is present to him is not more consoling.

2. He had always flattered himself that the day of the Lord would not come upon him suddenly. But behold he is stretched upon the bed of death, charged with the enormous load of his sins; he is commanded to appear before the tribunal of God, and he has not begun his preparation.

What a surprise! He is at the point of death, and all is yet to be done, which he had purposed to do in the time of health. He endeavours to flatter himself with the hopes that death is not so near, and to sooth his mind with the vain determination of making his peace with God as soon as his disorder begins to abate. These hopes cause him to neglect even the last opportunity, and he is the victim of delusion even to the last moment. Yes, my God! the scriptures must be fulfilled. Thou hast said that the sinner should be surprised in his sins; and thy word will not fall away.

At length the moment arrives, and he can hope no longer. Now comes the final separation from every thing that was dear. The more closely he was attached to the world, to life, and to creatures, the more does he feel the smart.

He must bid adieu to his riches and property. They already begin to slip out of his hands. The heap melts before his eyes. He retains nothing but the fond love of them, the unwillingness to part with them, and the crimes which he committed in acquiring them.

He must bid adieu to his beloved body, for whose gratification he has sacrificed his God, and his all.—He must bid adieu to his dear relatives,—his wife,—his children,—his friends, whose lamentations harrow up his very soul.——He must bid adieu to the world, which had been so much the object of his love.——In a word,

he must bid adieu to all creatures. Every thing seems to vanish from his sight. He stretches out his hands to the objects around him, as if to implore their assistance: but in vain: they disappear like smoke.

Now it is that God appears great and mighty to the dying sinner. At this awful moment, when the whole creation is vanishing from his sight, that great Being alone,—the self-existent,—the eternal Lord, who fills all things, and with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration, presents himself before him. In the day of his strength, he had frequently asked, in a strain of irony and impiety, how it was possible to entertain an ardent love for God, whom he could not see, and not love creatures whom he saw, and whom he was so strongly induced to love by nature itself? But now, he will behold only God: that which was invisible, will be the only

visible object. All other things will disappear; and God alone will take the place of those airy phantoms which had deluded him during life.

3. My God! what an universal change is this! He turns his eyes on every side to find some small subject of consolation: but in vain: the frightful horrors of death have encompassed him. He attempts to look forward to the state that awaits him: but here a more terrible spectacle presents itself before him. He would willingly turn away his eyes again: but he cannot: he is forced to behold it; and the sight fills him with horror and dismay.—A futurity, a region of darkness, into which he is about to enter, accompanied only by his works:—an unknown land, from which no one has ever returned:—an immense abyss, in the contemplation of which he is lost and confounded:—the grave, that gloomy mansion of horror, where he

will shortly take his place amongst the bones and ashes of his forefathers :— an incomprehensible eternity, the first glimpse of which strikes him with affright :—in a word, the terrible tribunal, before which he is about to appear, and give an account of his life, every stage of which has been defiled with crimes and abominations.——Ah! when he saw futurity only at a distance, he did not fear it : but now that he is struck by the hand of God :— now that he perceives the approach of death :—now that he beholds the gates of eternity thrown open to receive him, and is convinced that the moment is arrived when he must step into that futurity, which he so totally disregarded : oh ! he is appalled : he either falls into a state of the most abject fear, indulging his lamentations, and raising up his supplicant hands to heaven ; or, he becomes melancholy, silent, agitated, revolving in his mind the most

dreadful reflections; concluding that the mercies of God are withdrawn from him for ever, and that prayers and tears will avail him as little as fury and despair.

Yes, my beloved: this unhappy wretch, who indulged his passions without restraint; who had flattered himself with the idea that a few moments of reflection, that one act of compunction at the hour of death, would be sufficient to appease the wrath of God, now despairs of his mercy. In vain does the minister of the Lord, who is summoned to attend him, describe the infinite treasures of mercies which are in store for repenting sinners: he knows that he has rendered himself unworthy of them.—In vain does he attempt to allay his fears, by exposing before his eyes the bosom of divine clemency: his words do not affect him: he admires the charity of the Church, which never despairs

of the salvation of her children; but he knows that the decrees of God's justice are irrevocable and eternal.—In vain does he exhort him to put his trust in God, and to hope for the pardon of his sins; a secret, but terrific voice, in the interior of his soul, declares that there is no salvation for the impious, and that no dependance can be placed on the hopes that are held out to him.——In vain does he encourage him to have recourse to the last remedies which religion prescribes to the dying: he has no more confidence in them, than he has in those desperate remedies which are hazarded when all other hopes are lost, and which are administered more for the satisfaction of surviving friends, than for any benefit which is likely to accrue to him.——He puts into his mouth the words of scripture,—the sentiments of the penitent David: but his heart disclaims those inspired expressions; he

knows that prayers composed by a mind glowing with the most ardent love and compunction, are not fit for a sinner like him, who is surprised in his sins.—The minister of the Lord holds before him the image of his crucified Jesus; but the sight, so calculated to inspire confidence, and impart consolation, silently upbraids him with ingratitude, and reproves him for the abuse of the inspirations and graces which it had procured for him.——The moment, however, of dissolution approaches: no time is to be lost: the attendants prostrate themselves by his bed-side, and the minister of God with a loud voice commences the last prayer, or *recommendation of the departing soul: Go forth, Christian soul,* he says. He does not address him by any pompous title according to the world. No: at this last moment he lays all other titles aside, and addresses him

by that only which he received in baptism,—the only title which he held in no estimation, — and the only title which will remain with him for ever. ——*Go forth, Christian soul:* alas! he has lived as if the body were the whole of his being: he has even attempted to persuade himself that the soul was nothing, and that all would be annihilated with the body: and now he is informed that it is his body that is nothing but dust, which must speedily be dissolved; and that the immortal part of his existence is this soul,—this image of the Divinity, —this intelligence endowed with a capacity of knowing and loving him, which is on the point of being separated from her earthly dwelling, and appearing before her Judge.—*Go forth, Christian soul:* the earth, on which thou hast lived, was only the place of thy banishment; thy life was a state

of probation, a short pilgrimage; but thou hast made it thy resting place, the abode of sensual pleasure and vanity: the Church expected that the tidings of the approaching dissolution of thy earthly habitation would have been to thee tidings of joy and gladness; she supposed that thou wouldst have lifted up thy head, and exulted, because the end of thy exile, the conclusion of thy miseries was at hand: but, alas! she announces to thee tidings the most dismal,— the most alarming: she announces to thee the near approach of every thing that is terrible,—the beginning of pains and sorrows. —*Go forth, Christian soul:* stamped with the seal of salvation, which thou hast effaced; redeemed by the blood of Jesus, which thou hast trodden under foot; washed with the laver of regeneration, which thou hast defiled; enlightened by the light of

faith, which thou hast disregarded; favoured with the choicest blessings of heaven, which thou hast impiously profaned.——*Go forth, Christian soul:* go, present thyself before the tribunal of Jesus with this august title, which ought to have been the pledge of thy salvation, but which thou hast made the greatest of thy crimes. *Go forth, Christian soul.*

O my beloved friends! what a situation is this! In the retrospective view of his past life, he discovers motives only for regret; in the view of the present, objects only of affliction and grief; and in the contemplation of the future, horrors which appal him. O what a bitter draught! But will it not admit of one single drop of consolation? No: every source is dried up: the world is vanishing from his sight: man cannot free him from death; and God, into whose hands he is about to

fall, is his declared enemy, from whom he can expect no mercy.——He is agitated by the dismal terrors that surround him on every side: he renews his vain efforts to escape from death, or at least to escape from himself: his melancholy groans render his half broken sentences unintelligible; and it is impossible to ascertain whether they proceed from repentance or from despair. His dying eyes appear gloomy and wild: he casts a frightful glance on the image of his crucified God; and his attendants are uncertain whether it is occasioned by hope or fear, by hatred or love.—He becomes convulsed, but whether on account of the dissolution of the body, or the terrors of the soul, which begins to feel the approach of her Judge, no one can ascertain.—He sends forth bitter groans; but it is doubtful whether they are caused by the sorowful remembrance

of his past crimes, or by the dread of death.——At length, in the midst of these violent agitations, his eyes become fixed,—his features change,—his countenance is distorted,—his livid mouth expands,—his body trembles, and by this last effort his unhappy soul separates herself with seeming regret from this house of clay, falls into the hands of God, and in an instant is standing unprotected, and alone, before the terrible tribunal of his justice.

Thus, my brethren, do they die, who forget God during the days of their health: and thus will you die, if you are surprised in your sins. Every thing will change around you; but you yourselves will not change. It is certain that you will die, and, if sinners, that you will die as you live. God himself has declared it.——Prevent, therefore, this greatest of all

misfortunes, by timely repentance. Live the life of the just: and then your death, like unto theirs, will be accompanied with joy, with peace and consolation.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE DEATH OF THE JUST.

If you live according to the flesh, you shall die; but if, by the spirit, you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. . . . Rom. viii. 13.

THIS, my beloved friends, is a sentence which is not attended to by the admirers of the world until the fatal moment arrives when it is to be accomplished in their own persons. They live, thoughtless and gay, according to the flesh: they run on from one false pleasure to another, from one scene of dissipation to ano-

ther, from one crime to another: they still flatter themselves with the hopes of eternal life in the end; but the sentence is past: the thief comes upon them in the night when they least expect it; and they die in their sins. But I have already sufficiently warned you on that subject: I will therefore turn to one that is more pleasing, and by exhibiting before your eyes the just man in the last scene of his mortal existence, I will endeavour to inspire you with the love of virtue, and excite you to form such resolutions so to mortify, by the spirit, the deeds of the flesh, as to be entitled, like him, to live in everlasting glory.

The approach of death, I acknowledge, is sufficient to strike terror into the most exemplary,—the most pious among men. So inscrutable are the judgments of God, and so impenetrable are the secrets of futurity, that it is not in the power of man to look for-

ward to them with a fixed and tranquil eye.——But the terrors which are felt by sinners are very different from those which are experienced by the just man. The one is tortured by despair; the other is encouraged by the sweetest hope and confidence: the one is agitated by the recollection of the past, by the view of the present, and by the prospect of the future; the other receives the greatest consolation from these very sources. You have already beheld the one, and you were terrified; come, and behold the other, and you will be edified and comforted.

1. Imagine to yourselves that you behold the just man on the bed of death, with his eyes fixed on heaven, and with the most lively sentiments of joy and hope painted on his countenance.—He is not taken by surprise: the thief does not come upon him suddenly. He had long foreseen, and had prepared himself for this event: he had

laid up a store of good works, that he might not appear before his Judge entirely destitute: he had lived by faith, that he might die in the peace and consolation of hope. And now his last hour is arrived,—that hour, which had always hitherto been the subject of his thoughts, and to which he had directed all the self-denials and mortifications, all the crosses and afflictions of his whole life. Oh! with what ecstasies of delight does he look back, and contemplate his former penitential labours and sufferings!

The winter is now past; the storms are over; the time of trials and temptations is gone by: his conflicts with the world are at an end: the perils, to which his innocence was exposed, are vanished: the violence of his passions is subsided: and the obstacles, which flesh and blood opposed to his progress in piety, are removed for ever. His vessel has now reached the harbour;

and from this haven of security and rest he surveys the boisterous ocean through which he passed; he recalls to mind the tempests that threatened him with destruction, the difficulties he surmounted, and the perils he has so happily escaped. Like Moyses expiring on the mountain of God, he takes a view from the top of the sacred eminence on which he stands; he surveys the different events of his life,—the fatigues of the desert,—the rebellions of the flesh,—the calumnies of false brethren,—the pains of hunger and thirst,—the sufferings of mortification and penance,—the victories obtained over the world and the devil,—the conquest over his passions: and now, happily arrived at the term of his labours, he sings a canticle of thanksgiving and praise; he looks forward to his approaching dissolution as the recompense of his toils, and the completion of his painful pilgrimage;

and closes his eyes to the world in the sweetest transports of gratitude and love.

In this retrpspective view of the past, I will not say that the faults, into which he was led by human frailty, will entirely escape his notice: no: it could not be expected: they will all present themselves before him; but the sight will not be terrific; they will appear divested of their guilt, and expiated by the tears of repentance: they will recal to his recollection the mercies of the Lord, which came forward to support him in the moment of his infirmity; which raised him from the ground, and enabled him to run forward again in the paths of virtue with increased alacrity and speed. Yes: the sorrow excited by the view of his sins at that last hour is a sorrow of consolation and love; the tears which the recollection of them forces from his eyes, are tears of gratitude

and joy. The mercies with which he has been already favoured, assure him that there are more in store for him: the protection which he has hitherto experienced from above, encourages him to look forward to the future with the sweetest confidence. In the days of mourning and repentance, God appeared to him like a severe judge, whom he had offended, and whom it was his duty to appease; but now he appears like the Father of Mercies, and the God of all consolation, who is about to receive him into his embraces, and put an end to his labours and afflictions for ever.

Listen to the invitations of his Lord: "Lift up thy head, my faithful spouse," does he say; "the day of thy redemption is at hand. Thou hast partaken of my bitter chalice, and hast emptied it cheerfully to the dregs. Break the bonds of thy captivity, O daughter of Sion: leave behind thee

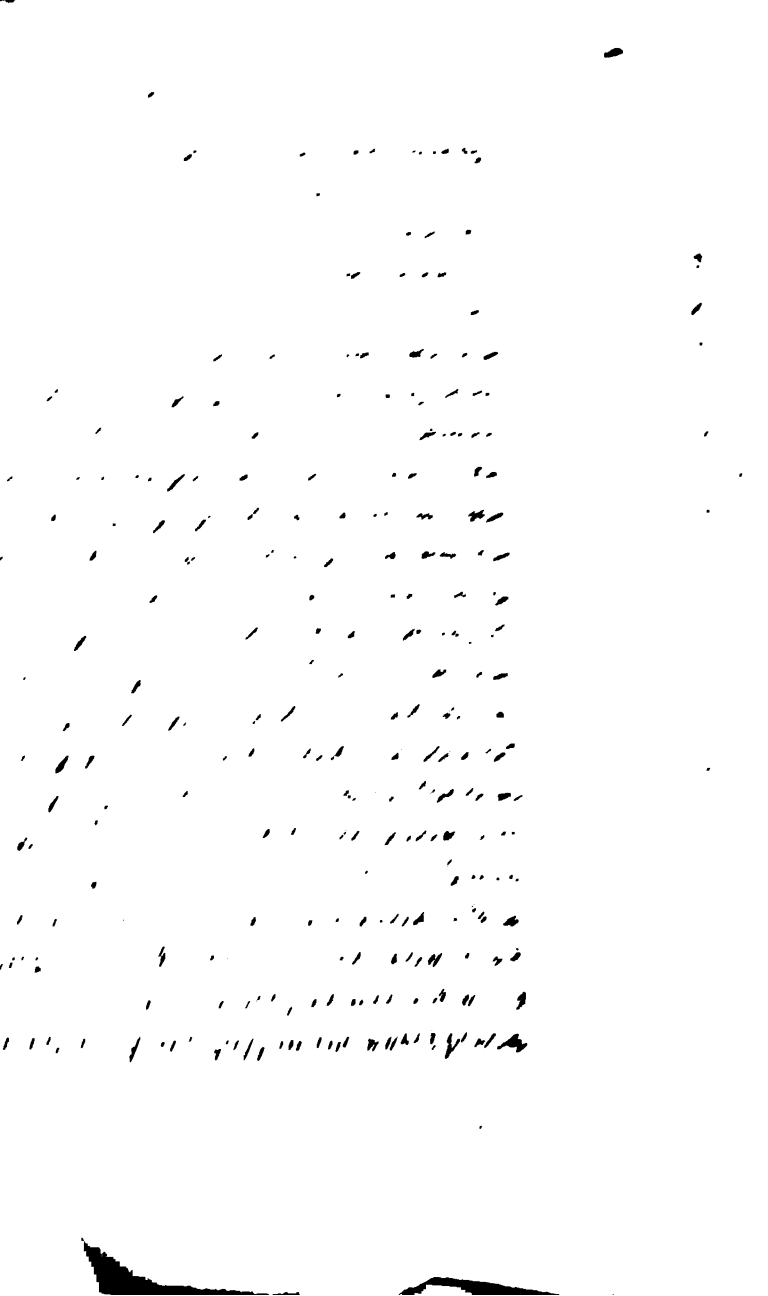
the garments of mourning and sorrow, and put on the robes of joy and gladness. Go forth from the midst of Babylon: thou shalt no longer dwell in the midst of the uncircumcised. It is time that I take possession of my own. Thou didst not belong to the earth: thou hast lived on it like a stranger. Come, then, my beloved: enter into the joys which I have prepared for thee in the kingdom of heaven."

2. Oh! what consolation is this, which the recollection of the past infuses into the soul of the dying saint. But this is not all: the view of the present contributes in an equal degree to his happiness. The terrors, which assail the heart of the dying sinner when he discovers that he is surprised in his sins, and that he is on the point of being separated from all that is dear, are things that are never experienced by the just man.

He is not surprised: he was always in readiness for the coming of his Lord. The day of his deliverance was the object of his sighs. The thoughts of death were familiar to him: they seasoned all his actions; they accompanied all his projects; they regulated all his desires; and they influenced the whole deportment of his life. He was always prepared to give an account of his stewardship; he was always on the watch, with his lamp burning in his hand. When betrayed into sin by human infirmity, he instantly rose again, and returned to his loving Father: he dreaded the idea of being separated from him even for one night, because he did not know but that night might be his last.——Thus did he live: thus was his whole life a preparation for death: and now that his last hour is arrived, he meets it with tranquillity and joy, in the sweet peace

of the Lord, and in the pleasing expectation of the full accomplishment of his promises.

The dying sinner is seized with despair, when he perceives that the world, the object of all his hopes and of all his wishes, is about to be taken from him. Not so the just man in the moment of his departure hence: he had always considered the world as no better than a vapour that passes rapidly away, than a phantom, which can only deceive us at a distance. And how rejoiced is he, at this his last hour, that he had formed this opinion of it, that he had never suffered himself to be deluded by its empty vanities, and that he had resolutely adhered to the service of *Him*, from whom alone he could receive an adequate and permanent recompense. Oh! with what raptures does he exclaim: "Truly, my soul, hast thou chosen the better part: with reason hast thou placed thy con-



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the idle sports and amusements of others; the common news of the day; and a thousand other vague and petulant fooleries, which he is ready to listen to, and his attendants are as willing to communicate, to keep up his broken spirits, and divert his attention from the dread and anxiety he would otherwise feel in the dismal prospect of his approaching dissolution.

But to return to the just man. Now is the time when he is to take his last farewel of all earthly things. He prepares for the separation with calm tranquility, and tears himself from them without violence, and without sorrow. The world never possessed his affections: he has lived in it as a stranger, and therefore he quits it without regret.—He was not attached to wealth: his treasure was in heaven; his riches were the consolation of the poor; he has laid up a store where neither moth nor rust can consume, nor thieves break

in and steal: and now he goes with joy to take possession of it in the kingdom of God.—He takes leave of his relatives and friends without grief: he hopes the separation is only for a time, and that those whom charity has united together on earth will meet again hereafter in the bosom of the Divinity.—He leaves his body without regret: this has been long a burthen to him: he always considered it a domestic enemy, which subjected him to the influence of carnal desires: as a house of clay, which detained him in captivity, and prevented his immediate union with the beloved Jesus. He now longs to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.

Thus separated in affection from all things below, it cannot be supposed that the changes, which begin to take place, make any impression on his mind. No: his body dissolves—creatures seem to vanish from his sight—

the light disappears—all nature falls, as it were, into its ancient nothing; but in the midst of all these changes, he alone remains firm and unchangeable. Oh! how great, how exalted is the true Christian on the bed of death? the just man struggling in the last stage of his mortal existence is a spectacle worthy of God, of angels, and of men. Then does he come forth the conqueror of the world and of himself: he begins to participate of the greatness and immutability of his Maker: he is lifted up beyond the reach of all earthly things: he is calm and serene in the midst of his excruciating pains: he is free among the dead: he is immoveable in the bosom of the Divinity, whilst every thing is dissolving around him. How truly great, I again repeat, is the man who has lived in the observance of God's law, and who dies in his love? How grand it is to see him advance with a steady and

majestic step towards the gates of eternity! Truly, my beloved, the sublimity of religion is displayed in all its lustre at this awful moment. Oh! *may my soul die the death of the just; and may my last end be like unto theirs.* (Numb. xiii. 13.)

3. It is this prospect into futurity that fills up the measure of consolation and delight, which the true Christian enjoys in his last moments. The sinner takes a distant view of futurity without any extraordinary emotions of fear: but no sooner is he summoned to enter upon it than he is seized with terror and dismay. The just man, on the other hand, is afraid to fix his eyes on the inscrutable judgments of God: he works out his salvation in the time of health, with fear and trembling; but on the bed of death, ah! then the God of peace and consolation soothes his troubled mind; his fears and apprehensions vanish, and he looks

forward with the sweetest hope. His dying eyes pierce through the dark cloud that encompasses him; like the blessed Stephen, he beholds the heavens opened and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of his Father, with his arms extended to receive him: he sees his beloved country, after which he has sighed so long—the holy Sion, which the God of his forefathers fills with the glory of his presence, where he inebriates his elect with the torrent of his delights, and replenishes their souls with those ineffable pleasures, which he has prepared for those who love him. He beholds the city of the people of God—the abode of the saints—the residence of the patriarchs and prophets, where he will again meet his brethren with whom he was united on earth by the bands of charity, and in whose society he will eternally bless the mercies of the Lord, and sing aloud his praises for ever.

Ah! when the minister of the Lord announces to this happy soul the joyful tidings that his hour is come, and that eternity is at hand, with what raptures does he hearken to the heavenly summons! *Go forth, Christian soul,* he says: quit this earth on which thou hast lived as a stranger: the time of sorrow and tribulation is past; the chains of thy mortality are broken; return into the bosom of God, from whence thou camest: fly away from a world, which was not worthy of thee.—*Go forth, Christian soul*: the Lord at length has compassion on thy tears: he is coming to open to thee the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem—the city of the saints: go; unite thyself to the Church in heaven, which is waiting to receive thee. But, in the midst of thy happiness, do not forget thy brethren whom thou leavest behind, exposed to the storms and tempests of the world; have compas-

sion on the Church on earth, which begot thee in Jesus Christ; solicit the termination of her captivity: pray that the term of her exile may be shortened, and that she may be united to her beloved Spouse completely for eternity.—*Go forth, Christian soul*: they who sleep in the Lord do not perish: we shall be deprived of thy society only for a time; to-morrow we shall be united with thee again in the kingdom of Jesus. Thy body, which thou leavest a prey to worms and corruption, will soon follow thee, glorious and immortal: more resplendent than the light, more beautiful than the sun: not a hair of thy head will perish. How happy art thou, my beloved brother, thou wilt henceforward be released from the miseries and afflictions to which we shall remain exposed: thou wilt be no longer in danger of losing thy God: thou wilt shut thy eyes for ever to the scandals

and vanities of the world, and open them to behold only the real and substantial good things of eternity. What a happiness it is to be called away from a land in which there is nothing but labour, and sorrow, and disgust, and to be invited to enter the abodes of peace, of serenity, and of gladness, where thy only occupation will be to enjoy the God whom thou lovest! *Go forth, Christian soul.*

Oh! what a pleasing summons is this to the dying Christian! with what calmness, gratitude, and confidence does he prepare to obey it! His eyes are fixed on the heavens: his heart throbs with unusual transports of joy: he seems to behold his Jesus coming to receive him: he exclaims with the venerable Simeon: "Now, my God, dost thou dismiss thy servant in peace. O burst asunder the enfeebled chains which yet bind me to the earth. My heart is ready, sweet Jesus, my heart

is ready. I wait in peace and confidence for the accomplishment of thy promises."—Thus purified by the expiations of a holy and christian life, strengthened by the last sacraments, washed in the blood of the Lamb, comforted by the interior consolations of the Holy Spirit, ripe for eternity, he closes his eyes with joy to all creatures: he sleeps in peace in the Lord; and he returns into the bosom of the divinity from whence he came.

Behold Christians! on such an occasion as the present, it is useless to suggest any reflections. Such facts as these need no comment. Such is the death of the good and devout Christian. His death, like his life, is precious in the sight of the Lord. You have witnessed the departure of the sinner who lived in the forgetfulness of his Creator; and you have seen that his death, like his life, was abominable in the sight of God. If you live, like

the sinner, according to the flesh, you will die: you will be encompassed at your last hour, with the same horrors and despair; and the tortures you will then endure, will be only a prelude to those eternal tortures which are prepared for the impious in the life to come.—But if, like the just, you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you will live; your life will be hidden with Christ in God in this world, and will be transcendently glorious in the next.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE INTERIOR DISPOSITIONS THAT OUGHT TO ACCOMPANY US TO THE HOUSE OF GOD.

It is written, my house is the house of prayer, *but you have made it a den of thieves.* . . . Luke xix. 46.

WHENCE this wrath and indignation in the Lamb of God? Is this consistent with the character of the King of peace, who was to appear in Sion decked only in the robes of meekness and humility? When the woman taken in adultery was presented

to him, he was all clemency and mildness. When Magdalen, the sinner, cast herself at his feet, he received her into favour, and pardoned her iniquities. When the disciples petitioned to be permitted to call down fire from heaven to consume a city of the Samaritans, he rebuked them, saying, that they knew not of what spirit they were. He even wept, as is recorded in the beginning of the gospel read on this Sunday, he even wept at the sight of the evils which were hanging over the criminal Jerusalem, on account of her multiplied enormities, although at the same instant she was meditating the completion of her crimes—the death of her Deliverer himself. On all occasions he was compassionate and merciful, and so great was his mildness towards those unhappy wretches who had deviated from the paths of justice, that he was derided by his enemies as the friend of publicans and sinners.

Whence, therefore, this indignation? What was the crime that called it forth? They profaned the holy temple: they dishonoured the house of his Father: they made it a den of thieves. This was their crime: and this it was that, above all other crimes, excited his wrath, and drew from him, on this memorable occasion, stronger marks of his real anger and indignation, than any that he exhibited during the whole course of his mortal life; verifying that illustrious saying of his by the mouth of his prophets: *the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.*

But, my beloved, if the profanation of the Jewish temple was so hateful in the sight of God, how aggravated must be the guilt of profaning the temples of the new law? Our places of worship far surpass in dignity and excellence all other places that have at any time been erected and consecrated to the worship of the living God. On our altars the

Lamb without spot is immolated: by our ministry the same victim is offered up which is adored by all the angels and saints in heaven: here the glory of the Lord is to be seen: this is truly the house of prayer; and to profane this temple, this house of prayer, is a crime of far greater magnitude than that which was so severely reprobated by our Lord in the gospel of this Sunday. A few reflections on this subject will contribute to heighten your veneration for the House of God, and induce you to enter into those dispositions of purity and innocence, which every Christian ought to possess when he presents himself before the Lord in his holy place.

1. The whole universe may, with propriety, be called the temple of the Most High; for from one extremity to the other it is filled with his glory. He is in every place, and in every thing. It is in him that we

live, and move, and have our being. Were we to ascend up into heaven, he would be there: were we to descend into the lowest abyss of hell, he would be there: were we to fly on the wings of the wind, even to the uttermost boundaries of the earth, it would be his hand that directed us: the most distant regions, where he is neither adored nor known, are filled by his presence, and are as much under his controling power, as the nations where he is most adored and worshipped.

Notwithstanding, however, this immensity of the great Creator, particular places have been consecrated to him in all ages, and he has vouchsafed to honour them with his special presence. Altars were erected by the Patriarchs; the tabernacle by Moses, and the first temple by Solomon. Here alone it was that the Jews were allowed to offer sacrifices: and here it was that they assembled at stated times from

every part of the world to worship God by prayers and supplications.

From the time that the new law was established, the faithful in every age erected temples and altars to the living God, and decorated them with the most costly ornaments. These temples, however, were more dignified, more awful than the tabernacle of Moses, or the temple of Solomon. Under the old law, every thing was done in figure: under the new, all is substantial and real. The Lord then dwelt in the heavens, as the prophet expresses it; and his abode was above the clouds: but now that he has vouchsafed to appear on earth, converse with men, and bequeath to us his sacred body and blood in the mystic sacrifice, he resides personally within our temples: these are the new heavens which he seemed to promise to mankind, by the mouth of his prophet (*Isa.* lxvi.): these he has made his abode, and in these he is

adored, enjoyed, and possessed by his servants on earth, as he is in heaven by his angels and saints. Men eat the bread of angels. I will not say that he is surrounded by the splendors of his glory in these our temples in the same manner as he is in heaven; he is concealed under a veil: but with this only difference excepted, he is here as intimately, as wholly, and as undivided as he is in the great temple of his glory above.

This being the awful dignity of our places of worship, this the nature of the new heavens which the Lord honours with his presence, it is only with the dispositions of purity and innocence that we can, with propriety, present ourselves before his altars, and pay our homage to him. He is, as I before remarked, in every place, and consequently it is our duty to be at all times pure and without stain: for deliberately to entertain a criminal affec-

tion for sin, is, in fact, to profane the earth which is sanctified by his presence. But our temples are specially consecrated to God : these are the chosen places of his abode, and consequently greater purity is required before we presume to enter, lest we defile the sanctity of the Supreme Being who inhabits them.

When the temple of Jerusalem was erected by the command of God, particular attention was paid to this subject. The utmost precaution was taken that no man in a state of defilement and sin should enter within the walls of the sacred edifice. The Holy of Holies, which the Lord had chosen particularly to set apart for himself, and which alone was considered as his real temple upon earth, was situated in the most retired, the most inaccessible part of the temple. In the environs of that majestic structure, at a distance, was erected a spacious court, into which alone the Gentiles and strangers

were admitted who applied to be instructed in the law. Nearer to the sacred edifice was erected another spacious court, and into this the sons of Abraham alone were allowed to enter: this was the only house of prayer for the children of the promises, the elect of God, and into this they were not allowed to enter (although far remote from the inner sanctuary, or Holy of Holies) until they had cleansed themselves from every defilement, and had prepared themselves by fasts and ablutions. A third court, more interior, and approaching nearer to the seat of God's interior tabernacle, was appointed for the sacrifices. Into this the priests alone entered; here it was that they offered up the daily victims, and exhibited on the altar the shew-bread. If any man but a priest presumed to enter this consecrated place, he was condemned by the law to be stoned to death as a sacrilegious profaner. Even

a king of Israel, the rash Ozias, presuming on his authority and power, no sooner dared to offer incense, than he was instantly struck by the Almighty with the leprosy, degraded by his subjects from his throne, and condemned to linger out the remainder of his days secluded from all society and commerce with mankind. Last of all, behind all these barriers and separations, was situated the Holy of Holies. This awful, this retired part of the temple, was concealed from inspection by a majestic veil impervious to the eyes, and not to be passed by mortal man, not even by the just, by the prophets, nor by the ministers of the Lord themselves, the high priest alone excepted; and even the high priest was not allowed to enter oftener than once in the year, and then he was prepared by numberless religious rites, by a solemn fast of all Israel: and he entered

carrying in his hand the blood of the victim.

And yet, my brethren, what was it that was contained in this awful, this inaccessible place, this Holy of Holies? Nothing more than the tables of the law, the manna, and the rod of Aaron—mere figures and shadows of what was to come. God himself, indeed, sometimes spoke from thence to his people: but he did not reside there after the same manner as he resides in the christian temples, whose doors are thrown open to all the faithful indiscriminately.

Now, christian brethren, if the goodness of God, under a law of grace and love, has not fixed such awful barriers betwixt him and us; if he has thrown down the wall of separation, and has given every one free access even to the Holy of Holies where he himself resides, what conclusion are we

to draw from it? Can it be, that less sanctity is required in those who worship him under the new law? Far from it: the only conclusion that can be drawn is, that the Christian, who is daily obliged to endure, at the foot of the tremendous sanctuary, the awful presence of the God whom he invokes and adores, ought to be pure, and holy, and faithful, in proportion to the familiarity of the intercourse which he is allowed to enjoy with his Creator.

It is on this account that the apostle Peter distinguishes the christian people by the several appellations of an *holy nation,—a chosen generation,—a royal priesthood: an holy nation,* because they enjoy the privilege of presenting themselves daily before the altar of the Lord: *a chosen generation,* because they are consecrated by baptism, and especially appointed to his service and worship: *a royal priesthood,* because they are made, in some

degree, partakers of the priesthood of his Son,—the great High Priest of the new law, and because they enjoy the privilege, which formerly belonged only to the high priest, of entering the Holy of Holies, and adoring their Lord on the altar of propitiation.

It is, therefore, on account of the sanctity of our baptism, and of our particular consecration to the service of God, that the sacred doors of the temple are thrown open to us. If we fall from this state of sanctity, we forfeit the privileges attached to it; we lose our right of presenting ourselves before the altar; we are not worthy to mix in the assembly of the faithful.

According to the rules of Christian justice, the temples of God are for the just alone. Every thing that is performed therein requires holiness and justice in the beholders; the mysteries that we celebrate are awful and tremendous, and ought not to be seen

but with the purest eyes: the victim that we offer, is the victim of reconciliation for humble and sincere penitents, or the invigorating bread of life for strong and perfect Christians: the sacred canticles that resound in our temples, are the pious effusions of the heart that is turned to repentance, or the warm expressions of devout affection in the bosom of God's faithful servants kindling into ecstasy at the remembrance of his many mercies, and ardently longing for the courts of the Lord. The Church expresses her veneration for the holy temples in a most solemn manner. She purifies with prayer every thing that is appointed for the use of the altar; she consecrates or blesses the very walls of the edifice within which the awful, the tremendous Deity is to be invoked and mystically immolated. She places water, blessed with solemn exorcisms and prayers, near the door of the tem-

ple, and exhorts the faithful to sprinkle it on their foreheads as they enter, to remind them of the necessity of purifying their souls from the smallest stains and defilements of sin, lest they profane the sanctity of the God into whose special presence they are about to enter.

Formerly, public penitents were not allowed to be present during the celebration of the holy mysteries. They were separated from their brethren: the porch of the temple was allotted for them, and there they prostrated themselves on the ground, cloathed in sackcloth and ashes: they were banished, as it were, from the face of the Lord, and not permitted to enter till a competent time had been spent in the painful exercises of mortification and penance.—This humiliating distinction is not made in these times. It would be impossible, on account of the multitude of believers, and the universal dissolution of morals. The Church

of God is now constrained to open the doors of her temples to the unjust as well as to the just: she now lifts up the veil of the sanctuary even in the presence of the profane; and her ministers are no longer enjoined to banish from before her altars all who are unclean, at the solemn commencement of these sacred and mysterious rites. But reflect, my brethren, that, although the Church is necessitated by circumstances to act in this manner, she nevertheless supposes that, if you have not effected your justification when you appear before the God of Majesty, you at least entertain the inclination, and are prepared to make the resolution of entering upon a course of penance: she supposes that, if you are not purified from your sins, you are at least sorry for them, and that your confusion will be the commencement of a new life.

The desire, therefore, of endeavour-

ing to satisfy the justice of God without delay, if you are sinners, is the only thing that can authorize you to appear in this holy place: and if you do not entertain these desires; if you are not come to lament over your transgressions, and to renounce all affection to sin, you are not, indeed, rejected by the Church, because she cannot see the heart, but you are rejected in secret by God; you are an anathema in his sight; you are not entitled to present yourselves either at the altar or the sacrifice; you come to defile by your presence the sanctity of these awful mysteries, to take your seat in a place that is not intended for you, and from which the angel of the Lord invisibly drives you away, as he formerly drove the first sinner from the garden of innocence and holiness, which the Lord sanctified by his presence.

In fact, what can be more insulting to the majesty of God, than for the

man, who is in open hostility against him, to appear in his presence without so much as one sentiment of grief or shame arising in his breast? What can be more irreverent to the sanctity of God, than for the sinner, defiled with abominations, to obtrude himself before the altar, to force even God himself, if the expression may be allowed, into familiarity with a soul polluted with guilt, and at the same time not to feel the least compunction, nor to entertain the most distant resolution of forsaking his evil ways? The man who is faithful to the law of the Lord is abashed and confounded in the presence of the Most High; he cries out in the words of St. Peter: *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a mortal man and a sinner*, (Luke v. 8.); or in the words of the Psalmist: *Turn away thy face from my sins . . . create in me a clean heart*, (Ps. l. 11, 12.): and is it not an almost unpardonable outrage

offered to the sanctity of the holy mysteries, that the avowed sinner should present himself without a blush?

For what is the object that brings him to the temple of God? It is to offer up with the priest in a spiritual manner the holy sacrifice: to present to God the blood of his Son, as the price of his redemption: to appease his anger by the dignity and excellence of the offerings; and to represent to him the title which he has to his mercies, now that he is purified by the blood of the victim, and is united with him? Ah! if he appears before him with a defiled and hardened heart, if he is a stranger to the sentiments of piety, and to the desires of amendment, he disowns the ministry of the priest who offers sacrifice in his name; he disavows the prayers which are poured forth to God; he refuses to entreat him to look down propitiously

on the sacred oblations, and accept them as the price and ransom of his sins; he abuses the love of Jesus Christ, who renews the great sacrifice of his redemption; and offers him to his Father as a portion of that Church without spot or wrinkle, which he cleansed and purified with his precious blood: he imposes on the Church, which, relying on the supposition that he is united with her in the bonds of faith and charity, pours forth in his name acts expressing the most lively sentiments of piety, sorrow, and compunction. Thus it is that the unrepenting sinner is, as it were, an anathema in the midst of his brethren; a man, who mingles insults with the canticles of praise which are offered up to the Deity.

What conclusion are we to draw from this statement? That we ought to absent ourselves from the places of divine worship, when we are defiled with

sin? God forbid.—Then it is that we are to enter immediately into dispositions of repentance, and fly to the altar of grace and mercy: then it is that we ought to throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus, and solicit his forgiveness: then it is that we ought to embrace every means which religion provides, of effecting our reconciliation with heaven. For, were we not to fly to the altar, whither could we go? Here alone it is that the sinner can find relief: this is his only asylum: here it is that flow the life-giving waters of the sacraments, which are to purify his conscience, and loosen his bands: here it is that is offered up the sacrifice of propitiation, which is to appease the anger of God excited by his sins: here it is that he is to be roused to a hatred of sin and a love of virtue, by the animated exhortations of his pastor: here it is that his ignorance is to be enlightened, his errors

unfolded, his weakness strengthened, and his good desires matured: here it is, in a word, that religion provides a remedy for all his disorders. Sinners, therefore, are to be particularly diligent in their attendance; and the more they are attached to their bad habits, the more speedy ought they to be in their application for a cure.

But if it be an irreverence offered to the sanctity of our temples and mysteries to come with hearts professedly defiled with sin, without remorse, and without any desire of amendment, what a crime must it be to select the holy place, and the time of the celebration of the tremendous sacrifice, for the time and place to instil into the minds of others the most dangerous passions, to indulge in wanton glances of the eye, and to take pleasure in criminal desires. Surely such a crime as this is perverting all the blessings of heaven: it is crucifying again the Lord of

Glory in the very place in which he daily makes an offering of himself to his Father for our salvation: it is devoting the time, which is employed in celebrating the holy mysteries of our redemption, to the worst of all works, even that of promoting our condemnation: it is selecting the presence of the great Judge, as the fittest occasion to offer him the greatest insult: and surely such a crime as this is deserving of the severest judgments of the Almighty.

Let us, my Christian brethren, avoid with the greatest care every species of irreverence and profanation. Let us enter the house of God animated with the spirit of prayer, of compunction, of recollection, adoration, and praise. Let us always endeavour to obtain an increase of grace, for here is the throne of mercy. Let us not desist until we have acquired a new relish for heavenly things, and redoubled our desires of for-

saking our evil ways, and of attaching ourselves solely to our only Good. Let us say, in the words of Queen Sheba to Solomon: *blessed are thy servants, who stand always before thee,* (3 Kings x. 8.) If any of you are prevented by the duties of your state from presenting yourselves daily before him in his holy temple, let your desires, at least, like those of the Israelites in captivity, be always turned towards it. Thus will our altars be your sweetest consolation in distress; your asylum in tribulation, and your resource in affliction. Thus will you enjoy on earth a foretaste of that unutterable peace, of which you hope to enjoy the plenitude and consummation in the company of the blessed in the eternal temple of the heavenly Jerusalem.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON PRAYER.

The publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me a sinner. . . . . Luke xviii. 13.

THIS is the prayer of an humble penitent, who is convinced both of the enormity of his transgressions, and of his total dependance on the mercies of his injured Lord. It is what the Church proposes to us, on this day, as a model of perfect prayer, and as a powerful ex-

ample to encourage us to have recourse to and familiarize ourselves with a practice of all others the most essential to Christian piety.

Prayer is necessary for man in his present state of existence: it is the first duty of man: it is the only resource and consolation of man: it is the whole man, according to the language of the spirit of God.

The Christian, consequently, must be a man of prayer: he is admonished of the necessity of this duty by every thing both within and without: his own weakness and corruption remind him of his incapacity to withstand the enemies of his salvation; and the dangerous and numerous temptations, which assail him on every side, convince him of the necessity of lifting up his hands to that Great and Supreme Being, from whom alone assistance can be obtained.

In this state of absolute dependance,

is it not astonishing, my beloved, that any Christian should be found of such an indolent and listless disposition, as to neglect a duty which is so very essential and full of comfort? And yet it is neglected by the greater number, and neglected as a thing that is irksome and unnecessary!

We will investigate the causes of this fatal neglect. They neglect, in the first place, because they pretend that they know not how to pray; and secondly, because they experience no consolation in it, on account of the incessant distractions to which they are subject in time of prayer. Their reason, as I observed, for neglecting it in the first instance, is because they know not how to pray; and to this I shall now call your attention, reserving the observations I have to make to you on the other head, to some future opportunity.

1. The *commandment that I command*

thee this day, said the Lord to the Israelites, *is not above thee, or far off from thee; nor is it in heaven, that thou shouldst say: which of us can go up to heaven to bring it to us, and we may hear and fulfil it in work? Nor is it beyond the sea, that thou mayest excuse thyself, and say: which of us can cross the sea, and bring it to us, that we may hear, and do that which is commanded? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it*, (Deut. xxx. 11, et seq.)

These words, which were spoken of the precepts of the law in general, may with peculiar propriety be applied to the duty of prayer: *it is in* our *mouths and in* our *hearts, that* we *may do it.*

Christians plead for an exemption from prayer, on the pretext that they know not how to pray. But a thorough investigation of the subject will convince you that this pretext is not

grounded in truth,—or in fact that it cannot be brought forward as a plea for an exemption.

In the first place, they are deceived in their notions of prayer. They imagine that prayer requires a great exertion of the understanding, that it must be composed with order and elegance, and that it cannot properly be performed without an extensive acquaintance with the mysteries and counsels of God. But this is not by any means the case. Prayer is the simple language of the heart,—the tender sighs of a soul lamenting her innumerable weaknesses and defects, and entreating to be delivered from them. Prayer does not require in the person who prays, either more refined talents, more extensive learning, or a more cultivated genius, than what are possessed by other men: it requires only a more lively faith, a more sincere grief for past sins, and more ardent desires to

be delivered from them for the time to come. Prayer is not a science that is to be learned from men; nor an art, that is to be acquired from books or study: no, by no means; the knowledge of it is instilled into our very being; the rules of it are engraven on the heart, and the only master who can teach it is the Spirit of God.

The simple and unlearned disciple of Jesus, who is awed by the supreme Majesty of his Maker; who trembles before the tribunal of his justice, and who is affected by the consideration of his mercies; whose spiritual wisdom extends no farther than to the science of annihilating himself in his presence; of confessing with all simplicity his wonders and his love, of adoring the ordinances of his holy providence; and of accepting from his hands with resignation the crosses and afflictions which he sends: whose prayer is excellent and sublime, only

because it proceeds from a heart that is impressed with the most lively conviction of its own weakness and corruption, and is anxiously solicitous to redeem the time that is lost, and to live for him alone: such a disciple as this is infinitely more learned in the science of prayer than the art of man can make him; such a disciple as this may say in the words of David: *I have understood more than all my teachers*, (Ps. cxviii. 99.) He speaks to his God as a friend speaks to his friend; he grieves because he has offended him, and because he has not sufficient courage to renounce all things for his sake: he utters the feelings of his heart, and opens his breast to the sweetest transports of love in the presence of his beloved: he is not discouraged even by distractions: he feels indeed the weight of his chains, but he exerts himself with redoubled energy to break them asunder, and regain his

liberty. My beloved, the whole secret —the whole science of prayer—is this. And is there any thing in it that exceeds the powers even of the most ignorant Christian?

The publican, in the gospel of this Sunday, received no instructions about the method of prayer. The conviction of his own unworthiness,—the love of God,—the confidence,—and the desire of being heard by him, were his only tutors: he expressed the feelings of his heart, and his prayer was sublime.

Ah! if it were necessary to be raised to that high eminence of perfection, to which some few chosen souls have been raised;—if it were necessary to be ravished, like St. Paul, up to the third heaven, and to hear secrets which God has not disclosed to man, and which are beyond the powers of man to reveal;—if it were necessary to be seated on a cloud of glory, like Moses

on the mount, and to see God face to face: or, in other words, if it were necessary to be admitted to such an intimate state of union with God, as to be disengaged, as it were, from the shackles of the body,—to be exalted even to the throne of God,—and to contemplate at leisure his infinite perfections; — to forget in some degree this earthly frame;—to be neither concerned nor solicitous about sensual enjoyments; —to be fixed, and in a manner absorpt in sublime meditations on the wonders and majesty of the Deity;—and, as if already partaking of eternity, to consider an age spent in that happy communication as no more than a short and fleeting moment: if, I say, in order to pray, it were necessary to be favoured with these choice and excellent gifts of the Spirit of God, then you might say with reason, like the new converts in the Acts of the Apostles, (*Acts* xix. 2.) that you had not

received them, and that you knew not the spirit from whom they were to be received.

But prayer is not a gift of this kind; prayer is not a gift that is imparted only to a few chosen souls. It is an universal gift: it is a common duty imposed on all men: it is an indispensable duty: it is necessary for the imperfect, as well as for the perfect: it is attainable to the unlearned, as well as to the learned: it is required of the simple, as well as of the most enlightened: it is within the reach of all: it is the science of every Christian: it is a perfection which every human creature can possess. Every created being that is capable of knowing and loving the Author of his existence: every created being that is capable of discerning his own weakness and nothingness, and the majesty and infinity of his Creator, is bound to know how to adore him, to return him thanks, to

apply to him for help, to appease him when he has been offended, to call after him when he seems to have withdrawn himself, to be grateful for all his blessings, to be humbled when he inflicts punishment, to expose his necessities before him, and to solicit the continuation of his gracious protection in a fresh supply and constant renewal of his tender mercies.

When the apostles besought our Lord to teach them how to pray, his instructions were conformable to this description. He did not open their minds to contemplate the sublimity and the depth of the mysteries of God: on the contrary, he taught them to pray as if they were speaking to a tender, compassionate, and loving Father; to present themselves before him with a respectful familiarity, and with a confidence seasoned with fear and love; and to apply to the heart for words and expressions to signify their neces-

sities and desires: he taught them to pray for blessings of the most important nature, that his holy name might be adored and praised by all men, — that his kingdom might be established in all hearts,—that heaven and earth might be obedient to his holy will,—that sinners might return to the ways of justice,—that infidels might come to the knowledge of the truth,—that he would forgive their offences,—that he would preserve them in the time of temptation,—that he would succour their weakness,—and that he would deliver them from evil. There is nothing in this method but what is simple; and yet it is noble; it recalls man to himself; and nothing is wanting to enable us to pursue it, but an humble sense and acknowledgment of our own infirmities, and an earnest, sincere desire to get rid of them.

2. This, I say, is all that is wanted. For does not the sick man know how

to ask for medical assistance? Does not the distressed pauper know how to solicit relief? Yes: necessity teaches them: the evils they endure inspire them with that true eloquence, those persuasive gestures, those pressing remonstrances, which are calculated to gain attention. The afflicted need no master to teach them how to mourn. Every word, every action bespeaks their grief: even their silence is a kind of utterance.

It is the same with us in temporal afflictions. When illness threatens us with immediate dissolution, when unexpected occurrences expose our wealth and property to dangers, when death is on the point of depriving us of a friend who is near and dear to us, ah! then we lift up our hands to heaven, in fervent supplication to the God of mercies; then we know how to pray without the aid of an instructor.

Were we as easily affected by the

distresses of the soul as we are by those of the body; were we as much interested about eternal salvation, as we are about the transitory possessions of the earth, we should be sufficiently learned in the science of prayer. Far from complaining, as we do, of knowing nothing how to pray, whenever we come to address our Maker, on whom alone is our dependence for all things, we should not know how to contain ourselves; we should not be able to repress our grief and lamentations, nor to moderate the excess of our love and gratitude towards him. Truly, my brethren, there cannot be a stronger indication of the weakness of our faith, and of our utter ignorance of the perilous situation in which we are, than the difficulty we experience in keeping our attention fixed for the space of a short prayer.

For, straitened as we are on every side, in constant danger of being se-

duced by the allurements of the world, of being led astray by the influence of bad example, of being subjected to the tyranny of corrupt nature, and to the empire of flesh and blood; powerfully disposed as we are to become elated by affluence, and depressed by want; to be flattered by applause, and exasperated by contempt; to neglect the service of an invisible Creator, and to seek our consolation in the enjoyment of visible things; in such a situation, is it possible that we should be at a loss what to say, and what to ask for, when we appear before the Lord in prayer? O my God! why is man so wretched! or why has he not the sense to feel that he is wretched!

Ah! were we to say that we did not know where *to begin;* that our necessities and weaknesses were so numerous, that it was impossible to represent them all to our gracious Lord; that the more we scrutinized, the greater

corruption, the greater disorders we discovered within us; that, despairing of being able to make a full exposure of our hearts, we presented them before him in silence and with humility; and that, overpowered by the multiplicity of the petitions that we ought to make, the power of utterance was taken away from us; if this were our language, we should speak the language of piety. It was in this manner that the penitent David addressed himself to his injured Lord, (*Ps.* xxxviii. 3, *et seq.*): *I was dumb, and was humbled,* he exclaimed, ... *and my sorrow was renewed.* I meditated on thy mercies and my ingratitude; and *my heart grew hot within me: I spoke with my tongue;* but in the humiliation of my soul, I could only say, that *all things are vanity, every man living.* This penitential silence was the most acceptable prayer in the sight of God.

But shall we say that no subject of prayer presents itself to our minds when we prostrate ourselves before the Lord? Let us look back on our past lives. We shall there, probably, discover sufficient reasons to induce us to dread the just judgments of God, and to sue for his mercies. Our whole time, perhaps, has been alienated from him: we have abused his gifts;—we have preferred vanity and worldly pleasure before him;—we have defiled our bodies;—we have neglected his graces and inspirations;—we have perverted the faculties of our souls, and acted contrary to those favourable inclinations to virtue which he implanted in our nature. The recollection of all these is certainly sufficient to furnish ample subject for prayer, and to compel us to throw ourselves at his feet, and with loud cries and supplications to solicit his pardon. If we can think of these things, and yet complain that we

have nothing to say to a God whom we have so often and so long offended, it is a sign either that our salvation is hopeless, or that we imagine it may be obtained from other sources than those of his clemency and mercy.

I say more. If we have been so happy as to receive a discharge from this heavy debt of guilt, and by the assistance of God have been enabled to renounce the vanities of the world, and to commence a life of piety, it is still more inexcusable to complain that we cannot pray. For, my beloved, we have been favoured with a most extraordinary blessing; we have been snatched from the brink of a most frightful precipice; we have been made partakers of a grace, which is seldom granted to sinners: now, if after all these favours, and all this love, we are not more animated, more inflamed, more delighted in the presence of our

disinterested benefactor, than the sinner, we are unmindful of his gifts, and are guilty of the basest ingratitude.

Ah! if we had a proper sense of the disorderly inclinations which, notwithstanding our change of life, still maintain their influence, and are continually endeavouring to seduce us from the law of God;—if we were truly conscious of the weakness and corruption which remain within us, and threaten to subvert the edifice of piety we have raised, we should not only be able to entertain ourselves with God for a short time, but we should pray always. The dangers which surround us on every side, the secret temptations and desires, which remind us that the man of sin is not banished from our hearts, would cause us to sigh continually after him, from whom alone deliverance is to come. We should pray in every place. Every thing would re-

mind us of God, because every thing would remind us of our own weakness.

If, however, our own evils are not sufficient to fix our attention in prayer, we may turn our thoughts to the evils which the Church endures;—to the spirit of schism and revolt which has made such dreadful ravages, — to the spirit of irreligion and immorality which exists among her children,—to the progress of infidelity,—to the almost entire extinction of faith which has taken place in the world. We may lament over the scandals which we daily witness. We may complain to the Lord, with the prophet, that all have abandoned him; that all are attentive to their worldly interests alone; that the salt of the earth has lost its savour; and that the pastor is not more virtuous than the people. We may entreat the Lord to place over us religious princes, zealous pastors, and enlight-

ened teachers;—we may pray for the peace of the Church;—for the extirpation of errors;—for the conversion of the innumerable souls that have been seduced from the religion of their forefathers to the wild and incoherent doctrines of self-appointed reformers.

We may pray for our relations,—friends,—enemies,—and benefactors. We may pray for the conversion of those to whom we have been the occasion of sin;—for those who are placed over us;—for those who are committed to our charge, and for whose souls we shall have to render an account. These are great, these are interesting subjects for prayer: and are they not sufficient to excite our solicitude, and fix our attention even for one half hour? Surrounded as we are on every side by objects that teach us how to pray, and that seem to exhort us to elevate our hearts to God, is it possible that we can have nothing to say to him when

we appear in his presence? Ah! my brethren, the man that finds such difficulty in entertaining himself with his Lord and Maker, is certainly far removed from him: the man that is at a loss for words in the presence of such a friend and benefactor, must be almost an entire stranger to the feelings of holy love.

3. Were we, indeed, to extend our inquiry, we should discover that this want of love is one of the principal causes why we cannot pray. The heart delights to entertain itself with the object of its love: if God were this object, it would be ingenious in its endeavours to approach to him, and enjoy the sweets of his presence: it would not be in want of words to express its amorous transports. Let us set our inward house in order; let us substitute God instead of the world in our affections; then we shall know how to pray; then we shall become familiar-

ized with this necessary science. It is not in the nature of things that we should be earnest in our petitions for those blessings which we do not value; that we should meditate on those truths which do not interest us; that we should importunately solicit to be delivered from passions, which we do not hate. No: prayer is the language of love; and if we know not how to pray, the reason is because we know not how to love. Let us, therefore, in the first place, acquire this important science; we shall then be able to pray; and by the means of that prayer we shall be able to obtain every blessing in this life, and eternal happiness in the next.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER.

And they brought to him one deaf and dumb; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him.

Mark vii. 32.

THE diligence with which the Jews applied to our Lord for the cure of the corporal diseases of their friends, is descriptive of that earnest solicitude with which we ought to apply to him for the cure of the far more grievous disorders which afflict our souls. He is our true physician:

he is the good Samaritan that came down from heaven to heal our infirmities. He beholds the dangers to which we are exposed, and incessantly solicits us to have recourse to him: *Come to me, and I will refresh you.*

But, great as our spiritual necessities are, how few of us apply to the throne of mercies for relief with that earnestness which a proper sense of our miseries ought to inspire? The greater part of mankind pray not at all: others pretend that they know not how to pray: and others are deterred from prayer by the distractions and dryness which they always experience when they attempt to raise up their minds to God. Your attention was called to this subject last Sunday; I will now resume the thread of my discourse, and will prove that distractions are not a justifiable pretext for the neglect of prayer.

1. One of the greatest evils which sin

has entailed upon us, is that distaste for prayer, and for the things of God, of which we complain. Had we remained in the state of innocence in which our first parents were created, our sweetest enjoyment would have been to commune with God: the whole creation would have been like an open book, in which we should have incessantly meditated on his wonderful works: our whole lives would have been spent in the contemplation of his perfections: and we should have been happy in our innocence, chiefly because he would have communicated himself to us in the most intimate manner, and have permanently fixed his abode in our souls.

How great, therefore, must the change be that has been wrought in our souls by sin! how must we be fallen from our former state, that the very duty which ought to constitute

our felicity, should be considered painful and wearisome. Such, however, is the state to which our nature is unfortunately reduced. All men feel a distaste for prayer: even they, who are habituated to the service of God, are frequently disturbed with so many and such importunate distractions, that they enjoy neither satisfaction nor consolation in the performance of this essential duty; and hence a pretext is formed to curtail, or to neglect it altogether.

Now to neglect prayer on account of the distractions or dryness that we may experience in it, is wholly unjustifiable; because these distractions and this dryness arise either, first, from our tepidity and failings; or, secondly, from our being in a manner wholly disused to prayer; or, thirdly, from the wisdom and goodness of God, who withdraws for a time the sensible con-

solations that are to be found in prayer, for the exercise of patience in the hearts of his faithful servants.

The first and most ordinary cause of our distractions is the tepidity and infidelities to which we are subject. How is it possible that we should apply to prayer with a mind tranquil and serene, with an imagination undisturbed by the phantoms which surround it, with a heart prepared and disposed to enjoy the presence of God, at a time when we are engaged in a constant round of dissipation; when we live in the midst of objects the most calculated to inflame the imagination, and to make impressions on the mind, which no time will obliterate; when we harbour in our breasts, I will not say criminal, but improper attachments, which divide our affections, which occupy our thoughts, and which either weaken, or entirely destroy our relish for the things of eternity.

Ah! if the most retired and holy penitents, if fervent solitaries, if an Anthony in the midst of the desert, if a Jerom, worn out and emaciated by constant study and unremitted austerity, if such men as these were disturbed in the midst of their sweet communications with God, by the troublesome recollection of past events, can it be expected that we, surrounded as we are by objects which engage our whole thoughts, which occupy our whole minds, that we, I say, should become new men at the moment that we go to pray? that we should be able to renounce, in an instant, all the affections which defiled and corrupted our hearts; that we should totally forget the world and all the vanities we had witnessed; that we should be on a sudden penetrated with divine love, or overwhelmed with sorrow for infidelities to which we are as much attached as ever; or that we should be at liberty to enjoy a tran-

quility of mind and heart, which is not always the lot of the greatest saints, in the deepest recesses of retirement? Oh! how unjustifiable are we, if we take occasion from our multiplied distractions to neglect the great duty of prayer! How plainly shall we perceive hereafter, that we ourselves were the cause of all that we at present so much complain of.

But let us enter a little more minutely into this part of the subject. We complain that we are unable to keep our attention; and that distractions take possession of our thoughts, notwithstanding all our attempts to resist them. Now, let me ask you; how is it possible that we should be recollected and attentive in prayer, if our thoughts are distracted and occupied at all other times; if we do not enter into ourselves, and fix our thoughts on God from time to time in the midst of our ordinary employments; if we do not

accustom ourselves to that interior recollection, that life of faith, which, in the midst even of the dissipations of the world, discovers abundant sources of pious reflections? In order to be free from distractions in prayer, we ought to go to prayer without distractions: we ought always to have a guard upon our thoughts: in our communications with sinners, we ought to take occasion from their cares, their fears, their hopes, their solicitudes, their miseries, to raise up our hearts to God, and fix our minds on that place of rest where sorrows will be no more. Were we constant in this practice, we should find little difficulty in collecting our wandering thoughts when we began to pray: we should easily forget the world and all its toilsome vanities and follies, when we prostrated ourselves at the feet of God: and what is more, the pious reflections that we had made, the tears that we had shed over the blindness and im-

moralities of mankind would cause us to fly with more pleasure to the cross of Jesus: would contribute to wean our hearts from dissipation and vanity; would convince us that no happiness was to be expected from the world; would induce us to return thanks to the Lord with greater fervour for the inestimable blessing of piety and love, which he has bestowed upon us in preference to so many thousands who walk in the broad road; and would cause us to behold in a clearer light the happy state of the man who serves God, and despises all created things, in order to live for him alone.

In the second place, we complain that we not only enjoy no pleasure in prayer, but that we are diverted from it by an insuperable aversion and disgust. That these should be your feelings is not surprising. Your hearts are centered in the world; your attachments are sensual; your affections

are earthly; and your love is self interested. Rivetted, therefore, as you are to created things, how is it possible that you should enjoy the sweets of heaven. The whole capacity of your souls is occupied by creatures; and where shall a place be found for God? Ah! you cannot enjoy at the same time both God and the world. When the Israelites had passed the Jordan, and had tasted the milk and honey of the promised land, the manna, says the scripture, fell no more; so contrary is it to the rules of unerring wisdom to give a relish for the things both of this world and the next, to any individual at the same time.

The love of the world is like a burning fever. It pervades every part of the soul: it causes her to languish and droop: it creates a loathing for the spiritual nourishment of prayer, and an indifference about the good things of eternity. If, therefore, you

perceive in yourselves symptoms of this apathy and indifference, it is a sign that the soul is disordered; that an interior fever, hitherto unnoticed, debilitates her powers; and that the love of creatures occupies the throne which belongs to God alone. Purify your hearts from every worldly affection; renounce every criminal attachment, and you will soon taste the sweets and consolations of prayer: you will soon discover that Jesus alone is amiable: and you will soon love him fervently when your affections are bent upon no other object.

Is it not true that, on those occasions when you had performed some signal act of charity, or offered up to God the sacrifice of your will, of your pleasures, and of your passions, you prayed with more attention, tranquillity, and delight? The servant that has recently given extraordinary proofs of fidelity to his master, presents himself be-

fore him with confidence and satisfaction: but the servant, who has given cause for reproof by his negligence and dishonesty, dreads the presence of his master; he hides himself, like our first parent after his transgression; he cannot speak to him with that freedom and pleasure which is inspired by a pure and irreproachable conscience.

When our Lord commanded us to pray, he at the same time inculcated the necessity of watching: *Watch and pray*, (Matt. xxvi. 41.): giving us to understand that the sweets and consolations of prayer are not to be experienced unless we keep a constant watchfulness over ourselves. I allow that prayer is a necessary means to enable us to watch over the motions of the soul, and to keep steadily on in a course of virtue; but at the same time I say, that without this vigilance we never shall be in a condition to pray to any real purpose. Both are essenti-

als, and both are inseparably united: prayer alone can obtain the gift of watchfulness; and watchfulness alone can insure to us the interior comfort which is felt in prayer.

Hence we must conclude, that were there no other effect produced by leading a dissipated and worldly life, than an incapacity of attending properly to the sacred duty of prayer, such a life, however free it may be from excess, however innocent it may be in other respects, is a life of sin;—a life, which will inevitably be succeeded by the second and eternal death. Salvation cannot be attained without earnest prayer, and without perseverance in prayer: any state, consequently, that opposes an effectual obstacle to prayer, opposes an effectual obstacle to salvation. Suffer not yourselves, therefore, my beloved, to be the victims of delusion; but examine the causes of the distractions and dryness which attend

you at the time of prayer. If you discover that they arise from the ardour of your worldly affections, and from the multiplicity of your failings, give yourselves no rest until you have removed these impediments, and given liberty to your souls: for thus only is salvation to be attained.

2. A second cause of distractions in the time of prayer, arises from not devoting sufficient time to that holy exercise. The man that prays but seldom, will not pray with devotion. Frequent prayer alone tranquillizes the mind, and effaces the impressions which it receives from the gay and airy phantoms of the world. Frequent and perseverant prayer alone pierces the clouds, and ascends even to the throne of the Most High. Frequent prayer alone can make us familiar with prayer; and familiarity alone can impart consolation and delight in the performance of it. To a man that prays

but seldom, God is always a stranger: in his presence he will always be uneasy and restrained; he will not be able to pour forth the effusions of his heart before him, nor treat with him with that freedom and confidence which inspires delight. The Lord must be known before he can be loved. The world, indeed, loses its attractive charms in proportion as it is known: the deeper you drink of the cup of its pretended delights, the greater will be your disappointment, your satiety and disgust. But you must know the Lord, you must enjoy him familiarly, before you will experience all his sweetness: *taste and see*, says the prophet, *how sweet is the Lord*, (Ps. xxxiii. 9.) The more you know him, the more you will love him: the more closely you are united to him, the more convinced you will be that the only true happiness to be enjoyed on earth is knowing and loving him alone.

Frequent prayer, therefore, is alone attended with satisfaction and delight. In fact, who are they that complain of this dryness, this apathy in prayer? They are the Christians who pray but seldom;—who devote only a few moments to it at stated times;—who pray with haste and with an unwilling mind;—who make no efforts to subject their minds to it;—and who, so far from thinking that the repugnance which they feel to prayer ought to make them more attentive to it, take occasion from thence to neglect it altogether.

But how can a person in the world, you say, find time for long and frequent prayer? How can he find time, do you say? My beloved, why is time given you? Is it not that you may be enabled to obtain the pardon of your sins, and prepare yourselves for happiness hereafter? Is it not that you may live a truly Christian life, and

lay up a store of good works for heaven? Ah! you can find time in abundance to solicit favours from the world, to visit friends and relations, to spend in pastimes and sloth. And besides all this, you have many idle moments in the day; you have many tedious hours in the course of the year: and supposing even that your whole time was devoted to the business of your calling, there is a great proportion of the day when, without any inconvenience, your hearts might be occupied occasionally with God in prayer! Ah! you have time for every thing except for the one thing necessary: salvation is the only business that cannot be attended to. Truly are you to be pitied, who can find so many moments for the world, and can find none for heaven.

3. It, however, not unfrequently happens, that the men the most regular, the most devoted to the service of God,

and the most constant in the duty of prayer, experience a kind of apathy, and are disturbed by a multiplicity of distractions. But in persons of this description, the cause of this apathy and of these distractions is not the world, but the merciful providence of God, who makes use of these means to purify their souls, and to lead them more securely to that happy state which he has prepared for them. Instead, therefore, of being discouraged, they ought to persevere in prayer more cheerfully than if the Lord visited them with sensible consolations.

For, in the first place, this dryness in prayer is a just punishment for former crimes. Is it not reasonable, my brethren, that God should chastise the pleasures of a worldly life, by mingling bitterness in the cup of piety? Perhaps the weakness of your constitution will not allow you to atone for your sins by corporal austerities: and can

you complain if God is pleased to substitute in their place the interior pains and afflictions of the mind? Is it to be expected that he will transport the soul in an instant from the pleasures of the world to the enjoyments of piety? from the flesh-pots of Egypt to the milk and honey of the land of promise? and not rather, that he will previously cause her to undergo the dryness and fatigues of the desert?

In the second place, you refused to return to God for a long time, notwithstanding the most importunate solicitations of his grace: you suffered him to continue knocking at the door of your heart unnoticed, before you opened it to him: you hesitated; you wavered; you doubted; you deferred, for a length of time, before you took the final resolution of entering into his service. And is it not just that he should suffer you to continue your solicitations for a short time, be-

fore he makes you partakers of his consolations? Are not your delays deserving of some delay on his part?

But without insisting on these reasons, there are others that call for your consideration. Perhaps you are deprived of these consolations, in order that your affections may be more completely weaned from the things of this world, and that you may be induced to sigh more ardently for that happy abode where you will behold your God face to face, and be for ever intimately united with him. Perhaps the only reason why you are deprived of this interior comfort is, that you may feel a greater compunction for the sins which have created this opposition and this antipathy to the things of God; that your piety may be purified from the dross of self-love; and that you may seek God alone in your return to him. Piety that is supported only by consolations and delights will

not last long. Duties, that are fulfilled only because they are pleasing, will soon be neglected.

You are taught, moreover, that you must desire to please God, and not yourselves, when you pray. Provided, therefore, this object is attained, it matters not whether the effect is produced at a time when your minds are clouded by distractions, or cheered by a ray of divine comfort. Now God considers the heart alone: if the heart be upright and constant in his service, if the sole object of your prayers be to obtain from God the perfect cure of all your spiritual disorders, your applications to the throne of mercy will be as favourably received, and will be as agreeable to the Deity when you languish under distractions and dryness, as when your breast is overflowing with the most pious transports of delight. And what is more, the prayer which is offered up in this manner is

more agreeable to him, provided you submit to the painful privation with patience and cheerfulness.

Pray, therefore, my beloved, with all instance. Whether you are sinners, or whether you are penitents; whether you are in prosperity or in adversity, in joy or in affliction; whether you taste the sweets of piety, or are disturbed by distractions and dislikes, pray with all instance. Prayer alone will enable you to conquer your failings, and to resist temptations: prayer alone will obtain the grace of perseverance, and the blessings of heaven. Prayer is the duty of all states, and of all conditions. Prayer is the soul of piety, the support of virtue, the foundation of religion. Pray, therefore, I say again, with all instance. Pray that the Holy Ghost would infuse into your souls the spirit of fervent prayer, and that he would graciously please to purify your hearts and lips, that your sa-

crifice of praise and supplication may be worthy of that weight of glory which he has in store for all who ask for it as they ought, in an humble, religious, and devout manner, nothing wavering, with all earnestness and perseverance, as best pleasing to him, and most essentially conducive to their own eternal interests.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON A VIGILANT ATTENTION TO THE MEANS OF ENSURING OUR SALVATION.

A certain lawyer stood up, and tempting him, said: Master, what shall I do to obtain eternal life?

Luke x. 25.

HERE, my beloved, is an important question indeed: — a question, which comprises every thing that is worthy of your attention, every thing that is worthy of your solicitude: *What shall we do to obtain eternal life?* Were we possessed of all

other knowledge, and ignorant on this subject, it would avail us nothing. Were we to be successful in our attempts to obtain honours, riches, and glory, and neglect the great business of salvation, it would avail us nothing.

This is a truth which you all acknowledge. You know the importance of salvation, and you desire to obtain it. But this knowledge, and this desire, do not induce you to make those serious inquiries which a Christian is bound to make. So far from considering whether you have attained a true knowledge of the means of salvation, or whether the path in which you are walking is secure, you conclude that every thing is right, provided you are walking in the highway of the world. ——But, my beloved, where is your prudence? In the affairs of this world you are circumspect to a degree of nicety: and are the affairs of the next

world less worthy of your attention? Shall the short-lived interests of time exclusively engage you, while the momentous interests of eternity are neglected? As Christians, it is your duty to pursue a very different mode of conduct. It is your duty to make salvation your great and principal business, and diligently to inform yourselves of what you are to do to obtain eternal life. For this purpose it is your duty, in the first place, to study well the lessons of gospel morality, with a resolution to practise them; and secondly, to act conformably to those lessons, leaving nothing to hazard, but always preferring security to danger, certainty to uncertainty and mere possibility. Considerations on these two points shall form the subject of this discourse.

1. Every Christian, before he determines, is bound to deliberate, and not rely on the opinion or example of

others on a subject where his all is at stake for eternity. The just man is characterized in the scriptures as a prudent and thoughtful man, who calculates, who compares, who examines, who proves what is best; who does not trust lightly to every spirit, who bears before him the lamp of faith to enlighten his steps, and to discover the dangers that threaten him. The sinner, on the other hand, is characterized as a foolish man, who rushes heedlessly forward, and in the most perilous track runs on with the same blind confidence as if he were in the most unerring paths. *A wise man feareth, and declineth from evil: the fool leapeth over, and is confident,* (Prov. xiv. 16.)

It is in this thoughtless and precipitate manner that many of you proceed in the great business of salvation. In all your worldly concerns, you are prudent, quick sighted, and provi-

dent: in the business of eternity alone you are rash and improvident. For instance; you are constantly admonished by the minister of the gospel, that a worldly life, I mean, a life which is devoted to the world, to its cares, pleasures, and vanities, without any regard to the will of God, or to the salvation of your souls, is not such a life as a Christian ought to lead, even although it be not marked with any criminal excess; and consequently, that such a life is hateful in the sight of God, and deserving of his future judgments. This is the doctrine of the religion you profess. This is a truth, which has been instilled into your minds from your earliest years.—— The world, on the other hand, contends that every one ought to live according to his rank and fortune, and that it would be singular and inconsistent with real virtue, to reject maxims and customs which are adopted by

all other men beside yourselves. — Here, then, the question for you to decide upon is, which of the two,—the world or the minister of the gospel,— is in the right. Now, supposing there were room for doubt, and the question had never been peremptorily decided, prudence seems to require, on account of the terrible alternative, and the irreparable evils which would ensue from an erroneous decision, that you should seriously examine and maturely weigh the merits on both sides. It is reasonable to pause and to doubt, when opinions are directly opposite, and especially when the means of securing your salvation are the subject of the doubt. On your entrance, therefore, into the world, did you, before you adopted its morality, its customs and maxims, did you compare and appreciate both authorities? and after impartially comparing them, did you really judge that the world was in

the right, and that the minister of the gospel resisted the truth, and endeavoured to impose on your credulity?

The world advised you to court the smiles of fortune, to place your happiness in them, and, in order to obtain them, not to scruple at even dishonest means. Did you examine the doctrine of the gospel on this subject, and find that it recommended the same as the world recommended? —— The world extolled luxury, magnificence, and sensual gratifications, and declared that you might, without sin, purchase these pleasures at any expence, provided you did not exceed your income, or injure your families. But did you, my beloved, look into the gospel? and if you did, are you sure that you did not observe in it an injunction to devote the temporal blessings of Providence to more pious uses? ——The world declared that it was not criminal to increase your patrimony

by means that were not strictly equitable, and that nothing more was required than to avoid such injustices as are forbidden by the laws, although the laws take cognizance only of open fraud and violence. But were you authorized to believe that conscience had no other laws than those of the land, and that there was no other tribunal of equity than that of your country? ——The world maintained that an effeminate, indolent, and dissipated life, was not a sinful life, provided it was free from criminal excesses. But did you consider whether the doctrine, which our Lord brought from heaven, was consonant with this new and dangerous doctrine of the world?

It too frequently happens that, in things relating to God and to salvation, Christians adopt opinions without examination, merely because they are adopted by others. They follow those who walk before them, without en-

quiring whither the path leadeth in which they are walking: they do not even enquire whether there is danger of their being led into an error: they are satisfied with knowing that there are other people in the same state as they are. But, my beloved, where is your reason on such occasions? In your worldly concerns you are sufficiently cautious. If asked to explain the motives of your conduct in any business where your interest is at stake, you bring forward the most solid and convincing reasons; you justify your conduct by the most incontrovertible arguments; you then shew that you deliberate, and maturely weigh every circumstance before you engage in an undertaking. But if asked why, in the great business of salvation, you prefer the abuses, maxims, and customs of the world, before the examples of the saints, and the rules of the gospel, you make no other reply than that times

and manners are changed, that people in general live and act as you do, and that you ought not to be singular. Good God! of what avail are a sound judgment, and a good understanding, if they are displayed for no other purpose than to promote works which will perish with the authors of them? Truly, my beloved, with respect to this world you reason like men; but with respect to the other, like children.

Perhaps you will say, that you do not possess a greater share of wisdom and prudence than other men; that you cannot enter into discussions of a spiritual kind; that you cannot comprehend all those nice distinctions and subtleties, which we are continually proposing to you; and that you do not think that piety depends upon such things.

But, beloved Christians, does it really require much comprehension to

discover that the world is a dangerous and treacherous guide? that its maxims are reprobated in the school of Jesus? and that its customs can never do away the law of God? These are the plainest axioms of the gospel: these are the clearest truths in the science of salvation. If you sincerely desire to obtain a competent knowledge of your duties, you have nothing more to do, than to proceed in the examination with candour and simplicity. Distinctions and subtleties will not be necessary, unless you wish to conceal from your eyes the true state of your interior, and to soften the rigour of the gospel down to the standard of your caprices and passions. Love the truth, and you will easily discover it. An upright heart is the best of teachers. Saul did not consult the witch of Endor as long as he was obedient to the commands of God; because he then discovered readily what his duty

was: but when he had forsaken the ways of righteousness, then it was that doubts arose in his mind; then it was that he had recourse to the oracles of falsehood, in hopes of easing his mind, and of persuading himself that the law was favourable to his passions.

I do not mean to question the sincerity, or to censure the conduct of the timid Christian who proposes difficulties, and seeks advice for the purpose of being enlightened and instructed: but this I will say, that the doubts and perplexities experienced by worldly men, generally proceed from the corruption of their hearts, while they only propose to themselves to silence the importunity of conscience, and, by keeping to the letter more than to the spirit of the law, to escape from the remorse which attends open and deliberate transgressions. If, indeed, you seek God really and in earnest, and if your own powers of discernment are

not sufficient to discover what is your duty, there are prophets in Israel: go, and consult those who hold fast the form of sound words, and who teach the way of God in truth: propose your difficulties, not with any false colouring, but candidly and openly: apply to God for his assistance; and, if there be any variation in the decisions given by his ministers, adopt that which is the least favourable to self-love, as being the one which will remove danger to the greatest distance from you.

Beware of the example of Lot. He, when on the point of separating from Abraham, being allowed to choose the place of his abode, lifted up his eyes, says the sacred writer, before he made his choice, and, beholding the plains watered throughout even as the paradise of the Lord, relinquished to Abraham the less pleasing country, and went and dwelt in Sodom, without en-

quiring whether his choice would expose him to danger. His imprudence soon met with punishment. In a short time he was carried away captive by the kings of the neighbouring cities: and no sooner was he delivered out of their hands, than he was necessitated to fly precipitately from the place he had chosen, to escape the avenging fire which fell from heaven on that wicked city. So seldom it is that the decisions, which accord with our inclinations, are at the same time conformable to the rules of the gospel.

2. This is a truth which, considering the opposition that exists between corrupt nature and the gospel, cannot be disputed. And yet, Christians in general are guided in their decisions concerning duty by their inclinations, although they are conscious, at the time, that it would be less dangerous to decide contrary to their inclinations. In the common occurrences of life, you

may easily discover the line of conduct which the gospel marks out as the safest to follow. You know the path in which Jesus Christ and his saints walked: his ministers frequently point it out to you: the success, which crowned the labours of the saints, invites you to walk in their footsteps. Thus it was, the apostle remarks, that the just men, who are gone before you, conquered the world, and obtained possession of the promises. You are convinced that, if you follow their examples, you will have every reason to hope for the same success; and that if you do not, you will have every reason to dread the worst of consequences. In such an alternative as this, can there be any room for hesitation?

Nevertheless, you will not choose the better part. You seem to prefer danger before safety. For instance, you are well assured that a life of dissipation and pleasure,—a life, that is devot-

ed more to the world and to the pursuit of wealth, than to the salvation of your souls, supposing that it be not otherwise criminal, is not the life which a Christian ought to lead, and, consequently, not to be depended on with too much confidence. At least, you are well assured that neither Christ nor any of his saints lived in that manner. Were you to lead a more sober and Christian life, you would have nothing to fear. This you know; and yet you prefer walking in an insecure path that is agreeable to your inclination, before walking in a safe path that is painful to flesh and blood.—— You are well assured, that if you refuse to co-operate with grace when it is given to you, it is very uncertain whether God will ever favour you with the same grace again; and that delay of repentance generally leads to final impenitence. You know that the only certain way to ensure your salvation,

is to embrace the means as soon as they are offered: and yet you refuse to do this, rashly depending on the uncertainty, which you know there is, whether those means will be offered to you again.

I will now submit two reflections to your serious consideration. First: supposing that your life were such as to make it equally doubtful whether you would be saved or lost, could you be said to have any real religion in you, if you did not live in constant alarms? It is terrible to be in danger of eternal perdition: it is still more terrible, to be walking in a path which, in the judgment of enlightened and pious men, is as likely to lead you to the abyss of hell, as to the mansions of heaven. Eternity is a thing of no small importance. As rational men, you ought to exert every power of body and soul to put yourselves into the more favourable situation, and not

to rest until there is a greater probability that you will be saved, than that you will be eternally lost.

Secondly: what is the reason that you are solicitous to produce the most plausible arguments to justify a worldly life? You are either sincerely desirous of salvation, or you are indifferent about it. If salvation be really the object of your desires, adopt the means that will conduct you to it, and renounce every thing that retards your arrival at it. Walk in the path which the Lord has traced out for you. Examine the conduct of the penitents of former times; they were no sooner enlightened by divine grace, and inspired to labour in earnest to make their calling and election sure, than they were convinced that the ways of the world were not the ways of God. They followed a more secure path: they relinquished the dissipations of a worldly life, and applied themselves

more fervently and more constantly to prayer and good works: they renounced all indecency and vanity of dress, and placed a stricter guard over their senses: they substituted the spirit of Christian mortification in the place of that love of ease and enjoyment, which they formerly indulged: they followed the gospel instead of the world: they proceeded on the surest grounds, knowing that it was folly to expect to gain heaven by those means by which others lost it.

But if you are indifferent about saving your souls, why do you employ mere sophistry to prove that your way of life is not in opposition to the gospel? Why do you torture yourselves with scruples, doubts, and anxieties? Why not endeavour to have your consolation here, since you have no other prospect but weeping and gnashing of teeth eternally hereafter? But no, my dearly beloved: I do not

counsel you to throw yourselves, after this manner, into the abyss of endless woe. My only intention is to excite a dread and horror in your minds, and to compel you, as it were, to relinquish a way of life which will as infallibly lead you to the gates of perdition, as a life of abandoned wickedness. Listen, then, to the voice of conscience, which interiorly admonishes you of the truth. It is not without reason that the Lord causes a few rays of light to shine occasionally upon you: he, by this, gives you to understand that he has not entirely forsaken you. Take care that you do not abuse this mercy, by refusing to correspond with it at the present time, in expectation of receiving it at a future period. You will then only have reason to hope for a thorough conversion, when you shall have begun the arduous task of working out your salvation. Begin it from this moment: begin it in earnest, and

with a resolution to persevere. It is the only business worthy of your attention. Endeavour to discover the most effectual means of ensuring success; and when you have discovered them, be not deterred, by the prospect of difficulty, from embracing them.

This, dear Christians, is the prudence which our Lord recommends to all his followers. Were you possessed of the most splendid talents, and capable of the greatest undertakings, if you exposed your salvation to danger, you would be more senseless than infants. Do not flatter yourselves with hopes, because you are walking with the multitude: take no man for your guide, whose life is not strictly regulated by the gospel. There are many ways, which are good and safe in the opinion of men, the ends whereof are death. The greater number of the reprobate suppose that they are walking

in the path that leads to life; and when the sentence of condemnation is pronounced against them, they will express their astonishment, because they look forward with confidence during life, to a share in the rewards of the just: *Lord! when did we see thee hungry?* It is only by adopting the prudence of the gospel, and adhering strictly to its maxims, that you can reasonably hope for salvation. Be sincerely convinced of this, and you will be induced to live in such a manner as to secure to yourselves the possession of all that is valuable for eternity.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON HUMAN RESPECT.

There is no one found to give glory to God but this stranger.

Luke xvii. 18.

THE example of the Samaritan, read in the gospel of this Sunday, is well worthy the consideration of every Christian. He was a man of a different religion and nation from his nine associates; he was at a distance from his family and friends; he was secluded from all society, but

that of his companions in affliction: in a word, by the circumstances in which he was placed, he was exposed to the greatest danger of being influenced by the conduct of others, and of being prevented from giving that glory to God which gratitude required. And yet he overcame every obstacle: he attended only to the call of duty; and, in obedience to it, immediately returned and threw himself at the feet of his benefactor.

There never, perhaps, was a time when human respect exercised such unlimited power over the minds of Christians as it does in the present age. Men, who profess to be followers of the gospel, are influenced in the performance of religious duties by the opinions and conduct of their neighbours: they hesitate to return to their Benefactor, to give testimony of their gratitude for his blessings, unless their brethren, who have been favoured with similar

blessings, return also: they are afraid of appearing openly in the cause of their Divine Master, and of strictly adhering to the maxims of the gospel; they are afraid of reproving the ways of the world, and of declaiming against the lukewarmness of the imperfect Christian, lest they should be exposed to ridicule. They consult themselves in all they do: and what is worse, they consult their temporal in preference to their eternal welfare.

This, my beloved, is not an uncommon failing; it may even be said that there is hardly an individual who is not sometimes guilty of it in a greater or less degree. I will, therefore, call your attention to this subject, and will endeavour to impress on your minds a full conviction of the enormity of the sin, by demonstrating to you, in the first place, the insults that is offered to the Majesty of God by human respect; and secondly, the folly and impropriety

of suffering ourselves to be influenced in any part of our religious conduct by the fears of what the world may think or say concerning us.

1. There are two ways by which the enemy of our salvation endeavours to undermine the happiness, by imposing upon the natural weakness and credulity of man. His artifices are directed to the total and everlasting overthrow, both of the good and the bad. The former he attempts to allure, by setting before them the fascinating charms of the world; and by the fallacious hopes, which he continually holds out to them of the high and vivid enjoyment that is to be found in the circle of sensual gratification, he endeavours to withdraw them from the service of God. The latter he attempts to deter from entering upon a sincere and perfect change of life, by discouraging and intimidating them with vain fears and alarms. A simple acquaintance

with the world is sufficient to secure the good from the danger of being overpowered by his mode of attack upon them, and to convince them that all that passes with time is vanity and affliction of spirit. But it is not easy for the bad to resist the attacks which they experience. The more we are acquainted with the world, the more we are liable to be intimidated by it: the deeper we drink of the cup of its pleasures, the more we are enslaved to it, and the more we are apt to be cautious and circumspect in entering upon a resolution to renounce it, and return to our allegiance to the Lord of all.

This apprehension, or fear, prevents the conversion of thousands; and therefore we ought to be particularly guarded against it. It is highly criminal in the sight of God to suffer ourselves to be influenced by it; more so, perhaps, than the very sins of which we desire to repent. For, my brethren,

the majesty of the God of heaven forbids that the most distant comparison should be made between him, and this contemptible world; and it requires that all the glory and honour that can be derived from men, should appear to us like smoke, when we reflect on the glory that is to be derived from serving him. Now the Christian who experiences within himself the sweet attractions of divine grace, and is withheld from following it by the fear of the world, not only makes a comparison between God and the world, but gives to the latter his decided preference. The sentiments which influence his mind may be expressed in these words: "My God! I would willingly devote myself to thy service from this very hour, if I could possibly do it in my present circumstances. I would gladly renounce for ever a world which is become insipid and burdensome, if by this conduct I

should not give occasion to the world to censure and deride me. I am convinced, it is true, that it is painful to be separated from thee: thou hast endued me with dispositions that are favourable to piety, and thou hast infused into my soul a secret detestation of those vices to which I have been so long enslaved: yet I continue to drag on my chains, although against my will, because the world, in the midst of which I am obliged to live, and which will not serve thee, is not pleased that I should serve thee. Oh! Lord! if I was at liberty to follow my own inclinations, if I could separate myself from the inspection of men, I would undoubtedly live only for thee: thou alone, in fact, art worthy of our service: but thou knowest how severe the world is upon those who devote themselves to thee without reserve: and since I am obliged to live in the world, and am constrained to take part either

with thee or with it, I have the weakness to walk in the paths that are offensive to thee, although I feel no satisfaction in opposing thy will; and I have not sufficient resolution to dare to offend the world, although my affections are alienated from it." O man! exclaims St. Chrysostom, dost thou comprehend the meaning of this language which thou holdest to God? Thou sayest, I consent, O Lord! to be anathematized by thee, provided I can but enjoy the approbation of the world: I would rather endure the eternal severities of thy justice, than forfeit the esteem and smiles of men. Such impiety as this, my beloved, must strike you with horror: and yet this is the crime of all those unhappy men who are withheld from their duty, or deterred from doing penance by human respect.

This apprehension, or fear, is not only insulting to the Majesty of God,

but it is a secret, tacit denial of the truth of his promises. Our Lord has engaged to strengthen the weakness of his servants, and to protect them under the wings of his Providence against the temptations of a vain world. To be deterred, therefore, from the service of God through fear, is to arraign the truth of this sacred promise, and to suppose that we shall be left to fight the battles of the Lord without receiving any aid or assistance from him; that we shall never be able by his grace to alter our opinion respecting the world; and that we shall always stand in awe of its censures and ridicule, in the same degree as we do at the present moment. But, my beloved, how erroneous is this supposition! The man who has sincerely renounced the ways of sin, and returned to God with his whole heart, is strengthened from above: the only impression that is made on his mind by the derisions of

worldlings, is that of compassion: he pities their blindness, and prays for their conversion. He is anxious that they should know the truth, and not that they should approve of his conduct; that they should bless the name of the Lord, and not that they should lavish this applause on him; that they should embrace a virtuous life, and not that they should admire his example. He is more solicitous about their salvation, than about their esteem; about the glory of the Lord, than about his own. *I covered my soul in fasting*, exclaims the royal prophet, *and it was made a reproach to me. And I made hair-cloth my garment; and I became a bye-word to them. They that sat in the gate spoke against me: and they that drank wine made me their song*, (Ps. lxviii. 11, 12, 13.). But I was more affected at the sight of their blindness, than by their contempt, and I prayed to thee to have compassion on them, and

to manifest the eternal truths of thy justice to them: *as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord,* (Ps. lxviii. 14.). This is the impression that the derisions of the world would make on your minds were you to enter seriously on the ways of virtue.—But this is not all. In the commencement of a new life, and of a true change of heart, the soul is unable to fix her attention on any thing but God, and the horrors of her past life. Yes: the compunction which she feels at that moment is so lively, the workings of divine grace so powerful, and the heart is so inebriated, as it were, with the sensations of contrition, and with the novelty of the holy pleasures of piety, that she is lost to every other feeling, but that of joy for the possession of her God, and of grief for her past disloyalties to him. O profane world! what influence can thy words possess over the soul that has renounced thee? what impression

can the desires and censures of thy children make on the just man, who is already exalted by faith above all things; who familiarly converses with God, as a friend with a friend; and who is indifferent to all that happens on earth. Like another Moses on the holy mountain, he seems to behold his God face to face; he enjoys the ineffable delights of his presence, and he is, in a manner, incapable of being moved by the calumnies and murmurs of those who are scattered below him on the plains. Ye just men, who hear my words, come forward, and declare whether I speak the truth or not. Relate the wonders of the Lord; describe the workings of divine grace in your souls when you first entered upon a new life; and convince the timid Christian that God may be loved to a degree far greater than the world can be feared.

But, perhaps, it will be asked, may

not a person dedicate himself to the service of God in private, and keep up his relations with the world as usual. God looks only to the heart: and if that be faithful to him, is it not all that he requires? why then give occasion to those satyrical remarks which are usually made when a Christian is induced by repentance to depart from his former line of conduct? This argument it was that influenced the mind of the renowned Victorinus, who was so celebrated in Rome for wisdom and eloquence, and caused him to continue in the open profession of idolatry, even after he was convinced of the truth of the Christian religion. "You know," says he to the first Simplicien; who was incessantly importuning him to embrace the faith; "you know that I "am already a Christian." "I will "not believe it," replied the zealous pastor: "neither will I ever reckon "you in the number of the faithful, "unless I behold you within the walls

" of the temple." " What," replied the philosopher, " do the walls then make " the Christian." But, continues, St. Augustine, who gave this account, God did not delay to enlighten his blindness. He became convinced of his error; and freely acknowledged that it was an act of impiety to blush at the open profession of the truth, and not to be in fear of openly professing, and systematically pursuing what is known by all to be directly opposite.

There is, I allow, a deference that ought to be paid to the opinions of the world, but it is not on those occasions when it will be taken as an approval of the abuses and maxims of sinners. No, my beloved, were a Christian to take part with the world from a foolish fear of being looked upon as a disciple of Jesus, and a true follower of his holy gospel, he would be less excusable, and would be guilty of a crime that is frequently

attended with worse consequences, than if he were to take part with the impious at once. He would offer an insufferable insult to the Majesty of God, by refusing him that public homage which is due to him from every creature. He would repay his benefits with ingratitude, by turning his back on the grace which enlightened him to know his duties, and to discover the emptiness and vanity of earthly pleasures. He would comport himself as if he was ashamed that God should have made him a Vessel of election, should have chosen him out in preference to the rest of sinners, and should have opened to him the bosom of his clemency and love. He would act in a manner every way beneath his native dignity: he would debase the noble faculties of his soul, and would sacrifice honour and sincerity, and candour and conscience at the shrine of dissimulation and hypocrisy. In a word, he

would scandalize his neighbour, and probably be the occasion of leading many into an error on a subject of the utmost importance; for the example of man who attempts to associate God with the world, is more pernicious in its consequences than the example of the avowed libertine. Indeed, the criminal excesses of the sinner more frequently meet with censure than applause, and are more apt to excite disgust in others than to create a spirit of emulation: but the effect is very different which is caused by the example of the Christian who is regular and exact in the performance of his duties, and at the same time enters into the spirit of the world, engages in all its parties of pleasure, and sanctions its maxims and abuses. The more pious and exemplary the exterior deportment of such a person is, the deeper impression it makes on the minds of others; the more it is calculated to lead them

astray, and induce them to suppose that the world is not so incompatible with the gospel as it is represented to be; that the Christian may serve two masters; and that he may have the consolation here in the enjoyments of flesh and blood, without exposing himself to the danger of being deprived of his consolation hereafter.—Thus it is that human respect, particularly in virtuous persons, is insulting to the Majesty of God, and productive of the worst effects.

2. But why should we pay such a deference to the world? are it censures or applauses of greater importance than our salvation? does our misery or happiness in this world, or in the next, depend on them? Do not think it: they are of no importance whatever; and there cannot be a greater act of folly than to suffer ourselves to be deterred from our duty by the fear of what the world will think or say. For,

in the first place, associate with whom you please in life, and study to cultivate their esteem and approbation with as much ardour and perseverance as it is possible, you never will succeed in gaining the good will of all. You will always be censured by some, however numerous your admirers may be in other respects. Whether you devote yourselves to the service of God, or continue on in the ways of sin; whether you renounce the world, or whether you consult its favours; whether you be meek and humble, or whether you be passionate and haughty; your conduct will be arraigned by many, and a most severe sentence will be passed against you. If, indeed, it could be effected that the suffrages of all should be united in your favour, then, perhaps, there might be some appearance of a rational excuse for regulating your conduct in a way that might best favour your purpose, by securing their

esteem. But this you will never find to be the case: men will never cordially unite together in their opinions. They are influenced chiefly by the passions; and the passions are things which do not operate upon all men uniformly alike.

Now if it be certain that you will meet with censure from one quarter or another, whatever your conduct may be, why should you be deterred from the service of God through fear of it? You disregard the remarks and censures of men in the ordinary occurrences of life; why then should you be so solicitous to avoid them when you are labouring for eternal salvation? Let us even suppose, that all mankind were to rise up against you, and condemn your conduct, what harm would you experience from thence? Your hope, and trust, and delight would be in God alone: from him only would you seek your consolation: and in him

only would you find it. Would it be with the view of pleasing the world that you endeavoured to save your souls? Were you to be condemned by God, could man save you? and were you to be justified by God, could man condemn you? Oh! my beloved: dread the judgment of God alone, because he will pronounce upon your eternal lot: but as for man, listen not to any of his remarks on the merit or demerit of your conduct. What has either his applause or censure to do with your eternal welfare?

In fact, the censures of the world are generally, if not always, the recompence of virtue, and may be called the most indubitable proof of its sincerity. A piety that meets with the approbation of men is to be mistrusted. The world loves only its own: and when it lavishes its applauses on the piety of an individual, there is too much reason to fear that it is worldly in some respect

or other, and open to the animadversions of the Supreme Judge. But if you are so happy as to be censured by it; then, on the part of God, I exhort you to fear nothing: *If you had been of the world,* says our Lord, *the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you,* (John xv. 19.)

But, after all, how inconsistent it is to be influenced by the opinions of men! You acknowledge, by the very act of desiring to serve God, that you have been deceived by the world, and that you are now convinced that God ought to be served in preference. If then you suffer yourselves to be held in bondage by the fear of its censures; do you not affix greater importance to its words than you know is due to the very thing that utters them? do you not despise the substance, and fear the shadow? and what greater act of folly

and inconsistency can there be than this?—Besides, is it not just that you should be deprived of the esteem of men? You enjoyed it at the time that you were not entitled to any esteem; at the time that you were the enemies of God, and worthy of his severest judgments: and is it not just that your much-injured God should now take possession of his rights over you; and subject you to humiliation and reproach for having formerly made choice of the world before him?—Lastly, you did not fear the censures of men when you walked in the ways of sin: is it rational then to fear them when you walk in the paths of virtue? Ah! are you timid, and ashamed when you are invited to give glory to the Lord of all? Is it for the man of virtue, the only character on earth that is truly noble,—is it for a man of worth and excellence, like this, to skulk and cringe, and stand abashed at the frowns

and obloquy of an insulting world, when it is in the power of every miscreant that pleases to come forward with an unblushing countenance, in the face and in defiance of his fellow mortals, and, not only to despise their counsels, and their judgment, but to silence their invectives, and even laugh them to scorn? And yet the world has seen this, and has seen it often.—Impiety exulting in open day-light—and virtue, and worth, and true excellence retiring, confounded and abashed from before the face of men.

My God! is it then a disgrace to serve thee, who givest life, and motion, and being to all creatures, and to whom alone belong power, and glory, and praise, and thanksgiving? Is it dishonourable to confess that thou alone art great, adorable, and immortal? No, my beloved, let us not be deluded by such empty phantoms, such vain fears as these. It is an honour

that the Lord allows us to serve him at all; and we cannot offer him a greater insult than by refusing to serve him through fear of creatures. Let us reflect on this; and if at any time we are urged by human respect to neglect our duties, let us fly the temptation with horror and disgust. Let us, like the grateful Samaritan, return to the Lord, and publicly give glory to him for every blessing that he bestows upon us. For it is thus only that we can make ourselves acceptable to him, and acquire a title to those never-ending blessings which he has reserved for us hereafter.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE VICE OF IMPURITY.

Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.... The works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury. Gal. v. 16—19.

THE injunction which the apostle gives to the Galatians in the words of my text, induces me to address you on a subject, which, if necessity did not require it, ought not to be so much as named among Christians. But in these days, when this detestable vice has extended its ravages

over the whole Christian world, desolated the fair inheritance of Jesus, and pervaded the inmost recesses of that Church which had formerly banished it from its precincts, you will readily allow that it is the duty of the pastor to raise his voice, and openly to oppose its progress. I will, therefore, display before you the pernicious effects which it entails on its unhappy victims; I will shew you, that no vice removes the sinner to a greater distance from God; that no vice more completely closes every avenue to repentance; and that no vice makes the sinner more insupportable to himself, or more contemptible in the eyes of men.

Do thou purify my lips, O God; and in the description of the excesses of the voluptuous, inspire me with expressions which may leave untarnished the beauty of a virtue whose reign I intend to promote in their souls; in-

spire me, I beseech thee; for the deeper the world is ingulphed in the mire of this vice, the greater circumspection and delicacy does it demand of us, when we dare to withdraw the veil, and expose its filth.

1. The vice of impurity, in the first place, opens an immense abyss between the sinner and God;—an abyss, which, in all probability, will never again be closed up. In all other vicious habits there exists some point of union, some means of intercourse between the sinner and God; but the vice of impurity destroys every connection; it pollutes the body, it clouds the understanding, it creates a disgust for the exercises of piety, and removes the unhappy soul to an immense distance from every thing that is good.

Yes, my beloved friends, it pollutes the body; it profanes the temple of God; it degrades the members of Jesus into slaves of uncleanness; it de-

files a flesh which has been nourished by the body and blood of the Son of God, and consecrated by the waters of baptism ; which is destined to become immortal, and to partake of the spiritual properties which distinguished the body of Jesus after his resurrection : it defiles a flesh which will be deposited in the holy places ; and which, mingling with the ashes of virgins and martyrs, will await, under the altar of the Lamb, the glorious day of his manifestation : it defiles a body which is more holy than this temple in which the glory of the Lord resides ; more worthy to be possessed with honour than the vessels of the sanctuary which are consecrated by the tremendous mysteries they contain. What an insurmountable barrier, then, does this ignominious vice oppose to the sinner's conversion ! Can the God of sanctity, in whose sight the celestial spirits are unclean, banish far enough from him

a flesh thus abused and defiled? His purity is such, that he would be humbled by a communication with a creature that had preserved his original substance spotless and undefiled; and can the sinner expect that he will stoop so low as to hold a correspondence with dust and ashes that are defiled by the most execrable impurities?

In addition to this, it clouds the understanding, and renders the sinner incapable of making those salutary reflections which are the forerunners of a change of life. Men, who before were prudent and enlightened, refuse to listen to the dictates of wisdom; reject the rules of discretion and justice; and, hurried away by the impetuous fury of their passion, are equally unmindful of what they owe to others, and of what they owe to themselves. Amnon, the son of David, dares to violate the purity of a sister, and loses both the crown and his

life. The wife of Putiphar is enamoured of her slave Joseph, and, regardless of the distinction of her rank, of her conjugal duties, and of the consequences that may ensue, pursues her passion with the wildest fury. David commits adultery, and his intellectual faculties are immediately degraded: he is unmoved by the fidelity of Urias, and coolly delivers him up to the sword: he discontinues his harmonious praises of the law of the Lord, and is insensible of his ingratitude to a God, who had raised him out of the dust, and exalted him to the throne of Juda. The two old judges, hurried away by their impure passion for the chaste Susanna, are not restrained either by the prudence which generally attends grey hairs, by the consideration of their venerable character, or by the exalted rank which they hold among their countrymen.

It, moreover, creates in the soul of

its unhappy votary an insuperable aversion to spiritual things, and a perfect indifference about every thing that is good. The few faint desires of returning to God, which from time to time shed their glimmering light on the mind, are overpowered and extinguished. The heart revolts at the idea of prayer, and shrinks back with horror at the sight of the difficulties and the self-denials which obstruct the paths of piety and repentance. It can attend to nothing but to this odious passion: with this it is filled, possessed, infatuated. In society, in retirement, in the most serious employments, in the temple of God, and even at the very foot of the altar, the mind is fixed on its favourite passion: every thing is impure to him, says the apostle, whose heart is impure. Ah! my dear friends, you, I mean, who have been deceived by the allurements of this vice, look back on the days of

innocence; call to mind the former sentiments of purity and virtue, which were implanted in your nature; behold the immense journey you have travelled in the ways of iniquity since this fatal vice took possession of your souls, and be astonished at the distance you have wandered from your God.

2. Be astonished, I say, and tremble: for of all vicious habits, there is not one that so completely closes the avenues to repentance. The loss of grace, indeed, is caused by every mortal sin, but the vice of impurity dries up the fountain of heavenly blessings in its source. It tends to destroy the very foundations of a Christian life; it leads to apostacy and infidelity. This is proved by daily experience. The sharp stings of remorse, disquietude, and melancholy, with which it is attended, so powerfully urge the soul to seek relief at all hazards, and at every ex-

pence, that she endeavours to eradicate her former principles: she calls them the prejudices of education; she doubts her own immortality; dissolute at first, through weakness, she wishes to be dissolute through principle; and as she aspires to no higher enjoyments than the brutes, she seeks to be convinced that her end will be similar to theirs. Thus the passion that corrupted the heart, in a short time undermines the sacred edifice of faith.

This is not its only effect: it tends to destroy the virtues which make man amiable in society. Mildness, condescension, and affability, are changed into dissimulation, hastiness, and pride: serenity of mind, the sweet companion of innocence, is succeeded by gloomy melancholy, and immoderate fits of joy: evenness of temper is replaced by humour and caprice: in a word, every quality that can either en-

dear him to man, or make him acceptable in the eyes of God, are expelled from the breast. Oh! how is the faithful city, exclaims the prophet, that was full of justice and truth, become a harlot? Justice dwelt in her, but now murderers. Thy silver is turned into dross, thy wine is mingled with water! (*Isa.* i. 21, 22.)

Were I to enter minutely into a description of the loss both of health and fortune, which impurity occasions, the account would be affecting indeed. What was the primary cause of the decay of so many noble and wealthy families, which we have so frequently witnessed? Ah! could we investigate it, we should find that it owed its origin to criminal excesses: could we trace the inscrutable ways of God, we should find that, on account of this vice, he severely chastised the transgressor, and continued his judgments on his children to the third and fourth

generation, till, at length, the whole substance was taken away, and given to others. You yourselves have probably witnessed its effects on individuals of the present day. You have seen the emaciated, the mutilated, the distempered countenance; you have seen the disordered frame: you have heard their complaints and their groans: you have seen them turn away with grief from the sweetest enjoyments of life, their souls being torn with remorse and melancholy, their bodies a prey to the most loathsome ulcers, and their countenances abashed by shame and confusion. Ah! my God, thus dost thou chastise the sinner by means of his very passions; and thus dost thou forewarn him, by the universal decay both of his health and fortune, of the eternal torments which thou hast in store for those who delight in carnal pleasures.

3. I have already said that the vice

of impurity makes the sinner insupportable to himself, and overwhelms the soul in the deep abyss of remorse and disquietude. I know, indeed, that remorse succeeds every vicious indulgence; but impurity has something in it so opposite to the excellency of reason, and to the dignity of our nature, that the sinner blushes at his weakness, and is ashamed of his inability to shake off the odious yoke. A lowness of spirits, and an inward sorrow of mind incessantly torment him: a secret gnawing imbitters every pleasure: the impure charm is gone as soon as possessed; but a sting is left behind. He would willingly avoid reflection, but reflection incessantly intrudes itself upon him. He envies the lot of the man who is hardened and thoughtless, but he cannot attain even to that dreadful state of tranquillity. He tries to summon up resolution sufficient to shake off the yoke of religion;

but the attempt strikes a deeper horror into his mind than the vice itself.

If, indeed, the powers of his soul could be satisfied with the momentary enjoyment, were it only for a short time, he would be comparatively happy; but the impure passion is insatiable. One desire creates another, one gratification occasions another. It knows no bounds: the most impassioned excesses cannot satisfy its wishes; the most unbounded licentiousness still feels a deficiency. It cloys, but it does not fill. It dwells with complacency on desires which it knows it can never satisfy.—This ardour of pursuit, and this inability of ever attaining its object, is painful, is insupportable. The wretched victim is inclined to envy the brute, because he has no reflection to augment his desires; he even prefers his condition to that of man; because the brute can follow his instinct without obstacle,

and without remorse; and is restrained neither by honour nor by duty, by fear nor by decency, but is guided and led by inclination alone. Oh! how degrading to human nature is this desire! And nevertheless, degrading as it is, it is frequently embellished by the poetical fictions of the lascivious muse, and sacrilegiously admired, and extolled by Christians who enjoy the honour of being members of the body of the Son of God.——O my people, saith the Lord, who hath inebriated you with this wine of fornication? Who hath converted my inheritance into a retreat for unclean spirits, and delivered up Jerusalem to the abominations of the Gentiles?

4. But, dear Christians, in vain has the world decked out this shameful passion with amorous epithets; in vain has a foolish and impious extravagance ennobled it by theatrical representations and delicacy of sentiments. It

is acknowledged by all to be a vice of the lowest and meanest kind, equally dishonourable to the man and to the Christian. In the whole catalogue of crimes, there is not one that resembles it. This, in no company where decency presides, is ever heard of. Its very name is a disgrace to the person who utters it. The crime itself is a foul blot upon the character and reputation of the wretch who perpetrates it, of whatever rank or condition in the world he may be, vilifying his nature, destroying the noblest faculties of his soul, and bringing down the man, with all the honours and dignities, and titles that are about him, to a level with the lowest of all that is contemptible on earth. It is not my wish to exaggerate in the slightest degree the effects of this destructive passion. I know that I do not exaggerate, and I appeal with the fullest confidence to the consciences of these bad men for

the proof of my assertion. I call upon the voluptuary to declare whether he would consent that publicity should be given to all his failings, to all the indecencies, all the intrigues, and all the thoughts occasioned by this passion, and that they should be seen by men exactly as they are seen by God, and as they will be manifested at the last day? Would he stand up in defence of his actions, were that part of his life which is the most concealed, because the most shameful, proclaimed aloud from the house top? No: the world, even the world, dissolute as it is, pays homage to chastity, and stigmatizes with the brand of infamy the individual who transgresses its amiable boundaries.

This, beloved friends, is a short description of the pernicious effects of a vice, which was forbidden by the apostle Paul even to be named among Christians; and which, with greater

reason, ought not to be the subject of discussion in the holy place, where the spotless Lamb is immolated, or from the Christian pulpit, from whence are announced the chaste law of the Lord, and the words of eternal life.

Ah! in those happy days, when chastity was honoured with its martyrs; when Christian virgins preferred the most cruel death to the loss of this virtue, then the Christian churches resounded with the eulogies of chastity alone.—The primitive pastors, the Cyprians, the Ambroses, the Augustines, exerted the powers of eloquence in extolling the excellence and advantages of virginity; and in their writings few invectives are to be found against the impure morals of their contemporaries, because few, whose manners were so dissolute and tainted, were to be found among them.

But now that this horrid vice has infected all ages, all sexes, all states

and conditions in life; now that it has effaced the primitive features which distinguished our forefathers from the dissolute and corrupted idolaters; now that the universal licentiousness of the age is attempting to veil over its odious and disgraceful form, we are called upon by every consideration that can make the name and existence of virtue at all dear to us, to raise our voice, and without restraint to declaim against the horrid encroachment of a passion, which, to the confusion of our common nature, is indulged and countenanced by all: we are called upon in the loudest manner, and summoned to proclaim with the holy liberty with which our ministry is invested, that if any one defile or profane the temple of God, which is his own body, him in an evil hour will God destroy.

Would to God that this faint description might have its effect on all

those of my present hearers who are under the tyranny of this fatal and execrable vice. Would to God that it could rouse them from their lethargy, and that in the fervor of repentance I could hear them exclaim: I will arise; I will subdue this disgraceful passion; I will return to my father's house. I acknowledge that I am an ungrateful, rebellious, and unnatural son; but he is my Father, and will not reject me. I will throw myself at his feet; in the bitterness of my soul, I will confess my unworthiness; I will say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I have sinned against heaven by the public scandal of my life, and by my continual abuse of thy holy blessings; and I have sinned before thee. But how shall I recount the secret crimes and abominations which I indulged before thy eyes? The very idea of my past iniquities chills my veins; I cannot recount them. My

God! I have repaid the love of the best of Fathers by the rebellious ingratitude of the most unnatural of children.

My dear friends, were you to entertain and persevere in these sentiments, what heavenly consolations would flow into your souls! With what canticles of joy would the spirits above celebrate your conversion! O God of clemency, O God of compassion and forgiveness, lend thine ear to the earnest prayer of thy unworthy servant. Open the eyes of thy misguided creatures,—infuse into their hearts the spirit of compunction; that so being recovered from the error of their ways, they may be admitted into the society of the chaste in the regions of pure and immaculate felicity.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DEATH.

And when Jesus came nigh to the gate of the city, behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

Luke vii. 12.

WHAT an affecting spectacle, my beloved brethren, is presented before us in the gospel of this Sunday. An only son, the sole inheritor of the name, the titles, and the patrimony of his ancestors, is snatched away by an untimely death from the arms of a disconsolate and widowed

parent, and hurried unexpectedly to the tomb in the very bloom of life: the perils of infancy had gone by; the labours of education had been completed; strength and reason had been brought to maturity; and the season of life had arrived, which seemed to promise the greatest security against the fear of so melancholy a reverse.—A multitude of his fellow-citizens mingle their tears with those of his afflicted parent: they endeavour to pour the balm of consolation on her aching heart: they assemble round the bier; and solemnize the obsequies by their attendance and mourning. That an impression was made on their minds, on this occasion, of deep sorrow and regret, and that many wholesome reflections were to be heard on all sides on the vanity of human life and human expectations, there can be little doubt; but is it equally probable, that, had the ceremony been conducted to

its close, as usual, and the body been deposited in the grave, the salutary, mournful reflections would have been of any long continuance? Would it have been an instructive lesson to them? Would it have caused them to be less attached to this transitory world? or rather, would not the remembrance of it have been obliterated from their minds almost as soon as the mournful ceremony had ended?

So it is, at least with the greater part of mankind. The sentiments which a sudden death creates in our minds, are but the sentiments of a few passing hours. We indulge reflections on the inconstancy of all human affairs: but no sooner is the object which occasioned them out of our sight, than our cares, our solicitudes, our worldly attachments instantly regain their former ascendancy over us. Although perhaps we have just been witnessing the vain and perishable na-

ture of all that is usually so promising on earth, in the sudden departure of birth and fortune, and strength and beauty, fading in the prime of life, and dropping into the grave before our eyes, we return to the world as much busied, and as much in earnest in the pursuit of those vain objects, the emptiness and uncertainty of which had been so affectingly displayed before us.

What is the reason, my friends, that the thoughts of death make such faint impressions on our minds? Is it not that the uncertainty of the time of its arrival gives us confidence, and induces us to suppose that it is at a great distance from us, and that we may take our rest for many years to come? If this has been our delusion, I will endeavour to dispel the fatal charm, and convince you from the imminent danger that continually hangs over us, and is seen to threaten us on every side, of the strict and urgent necessity

there is of our being constantly on the watch, and in a state of continual preparation.

1. The first step which we took in life led directly towards the grave. No sooner were our eyes opened to the light, than the sentence of death was passed upon us: and, as if existence were a crime, we no sooner began to enjoy it, than we were judged worthy of death. This was not our original destiny. We were formed for immortality: but no sooner did sin enter into the world, than death followed in its train, and by the justice of God was authorized to claim the whole created universe as his devoted prey.

Thus were we all consigned into the hands of death: we imbibed from the bowels of our parent a slow poison, which causes us to languish here below, some for a shorter, and some for a longer period, but which always has its effect at last, and ends in death:

we die daily: every instant deprives us of a portion of our lives, and thrusts us on towards the grave. In such a situation as this, what consideration is there that ought to be so familiar to us as the thought of death? He who is condemned to die, sees in every object that presents itself something to remind him of his approaching fate: and is the continuance here, whether of a shorter or a longer date, of such mighty importance to us, as to induce us to banish from our thoughts all idea and recollection of the sentence, sure and irreversible, that has been passed upon us?

It is true, indeed, that all men have not the same appointed period for their departure hence. The age of some is extended to an advanced period: and these, like the ancient patriarchs, die full of days in the arms of a numerous posterity. Others are arrested in their mid career, and, like

the king of Juda, behold the gates of death ready to close upon them, in the midst of their days. Others appear on the earth, and sink immediately into the grave: like the flowers of the field, they expand, wither, and decay. The fatal moment appointed for each one to die, is a secret written in the eternal books, which the Lamb only is entitled to open. The number of our years, therefore, is hidden from us: we live in a state of dreadful incertitude: and this incertitude, instead of striking terror into our souls, banishes the recollection of it from our minds; we fear not, because the object which ought to excite our fears, is concealed from our view.

But, my beloved, of all dispositions this is the most irrational and inconsiderate. Is that misfortune, which may fall upon us every instant, less to be dreaded than the one which threatens only after a certain number of

years? Our souls may this night be demanded of us: and is that a sufficient reason to induce us to live on in a state of as perfect tranquillity as if they would never be called for? The danger is always hanging over our heads: and ought we to pay no attention to it on that very account? It is not in this manner that we act in affairs that are of far less consequence than that of salvation: incertitude is a spur to activity and vigilance: and never is it adduced as a motive for sloth and torpid indifference?

Ah! had the hour of dissolution been manifested to us; had the number of our years, and the fatal moment of their close, been inscribed on our foreheads at our birth, with what disquietude, with what alarm should we have looked forward to the destined period! how short would the time have appeared! how unceasingly would the thought have intruded it-

self into our minds! what a check would it have imposed on our passions and lusts! how carefully should we have put every instant to profit, and prepared ourselves for the awful trial which awaited us! And is it possible that rational beings, whose fears would be excited by the foreknowledge of the hour of death, can live on in a state of thoughtless indifference, now that the knowledge of it is concealed from them; now that they are in the greatest uncertainty whether death will not surprise them on a sudden when they least expect it? Is it possible that rational beings can be eager in the pursuit of vanity and folly, when this uncertainty exposes them to the danger every instant of being cut off in the midst of their sins, and summoned to give an account of their stewardship?

Suffer not yourselves, my brethren, to be deluded on a subject of this im-

portance. The uncertainty of death is attended with every circumstance that is calculated to terrify and alarm the mind of a thinking and prudent man. In the first place, to be surprised by death is not an uncommon occurrence; nor is it a misfortune, that happens only to a few ill-fated individuals, and for that reason more to be despised than dreaded: no: it is an occurrence that happens daily and hourly. Very few there are who are not cut off sooner than they expected. It was thus probably that your relations,—your friends,—your acquaintances were hurried into the grave. You were grieved and astonished at their premature decease; and perhaps attributed it to accident, to the inexperience or imprudence of the physician, or to other causes; but the true and only cause was, that the day of the Lord is generally sudden and unexpected. The earth is like an immense

field of battle, on which we are constantly engaged with the enemy. You have fortunately escaped hitherto; but you have seen many fall on every side, who expected to escape as well as yourselves: to-morrow you will be engaged again; and have you any security that death, who is so capricious in the choice of his victims, will still favour you? Sooner or later you must inevitably fall; and it may be to-morrow as well as any other day: and is it prudent, is it rational to attempt to build a solid and permanent abode on the very spot, which, perhaps, is destined to be your grave? Whatever your situation in life may be, there is not an instant but may be your last: not an action can be performed, not a movement can be made, that may not hurry you precipitately to the grave: every day that you devote to festivity and mirth may be succeeded by the day of final retribution: every time

that your eyes are closed in sleep, they may be closed for ever: every crime that you commit, may fill up the measure of your iniquities: every fit of illness may be the cause of your dissolution; the most trifling infirmities frequently baffle the experience of the most skilful physicians, become dangerous on a sudden, and end in death. All this you know: all this you acknowledge: and yet this alarming declaration is a mere expression,—a form of words, which neither makes an impression on your minds, nor causes you to take a single precaution to secure yourselves against the danger of a surprise.

In the second place, if uncertainty were only as to the hour, and the manner in which we may be carried off, there would not be such pressing motives for alarm: for it is of little consequence to the Christian where or how he dies, provided he die in the

state of grace. But the uncertainty extends to this likewise. You are uncertain whether you will die in the Lord or in your sins: you know not what will be your condition in that land, where there is no change, nor shadow of alteration: you know not into what hands your poor, deserted, trembling souls will fall after they have quitted the body; whether they will be environed with light, and transported on the wings of angels into the mansions of the blessed, or enveloped in a cloud of darkness, and hurried headlong into the deep abyss. You are placed between these two extremities, and which of them will be your portion death alone can determine. What a dreadful uncertainty is this! and yet you are not alarmed! You take as little notice of the approaches of death, as if you had no interests at stake. Ah! on the supposition even that all was to end with our mortal

existence, the unbeliever would have no reason to say: "let us not think of our last hour; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." No: the sentence would give him no consolation: for the more he was attached to life, the greater reason would he have to fear death, which, in his opinion, would hurl him again into his original nothing, and blot him out of the creation. But you, my beloved, you behold in the light of faith punishments and rewards eternal beyond the grave: and can there be a greater act of folly, a greater act of madness, placed as you are in a state of the most alarming incertitude, than to live on as if you had actually adopted the sentiments of the unbeliever, and as if your only solicitude was to enjoy as much of the good things of this world as possible, before the fatal moment arrived? Were you truly wise, were you sincerely desirous of securing your eternal happiness, you

would have the thoughts of death continually present to your minds, and you would endeavour by works of piety to guard against a surprise, the consequences of which would be irreparable.

Thirdly, incertitude in all other occurrences of life is attended with many consoling circumstances: for either the danger is diminished on account of the numbers that are exposed to it, or a hope may be entertained that resources equal to the exigencies may be discovered in the time of need; or, if all should fail, that experience will be a useful lesson, and be the means of preventing the like misfortune in future. But the uncertainty of death is attended with no consoling circumstance. The danger is not diminished by the numbers that are exposed to it: the resources that are offered on the bed of sickness are generally ineffectual; and the experience

which is gained by a failure is of no avail.

On what pretence, therefore, can you justify this total, this inexplicable forgetfulness of your last hour? Is it because vigour of youth seems to promise many years of enjoyment? But what can be more fallacious? Is youth secure from the attacks of death? No. the son of the widow of Naim was young, and he was cut off. Youth is the time of the greatest danger, and the victims of death in that stage of life are more numerous than in any other.

Do you rely upon the strength of your constitution? But what is health even in its best state? Alas! it is no more than a spark which may be extinguished by the slightest blast: one day of severe illness is sufficient to break down the most vigorous frame. But who are you that boast of this strength of constitution? do you boast of it

when you are summoned to perform the works of mortification and penance? However, without enquiring whether your constitution is strong or weak; whether it has been injured by the follies and indiscretions of youth or not; whether you perceive in your frame any habitual complaints, any secret weaknesses, any signs of mortality or not; I will suppose that your years will be lengthened out beyond your utmost expectations; and after all, what would be the span of your existence? Nothing is long that will have an end. Look behind you: what is become of the years that are passed? They are flown: they have left nothing behind them but a faint remembrance: they are like the dream of the night: it is as if you dreamt that you had lived so long. This is all that remains. The whole space that has intervened between your birth and the present hour, has passed by like an ar-

row, and its trace is not to be found. Recall to mind the great events that happened in your time,—the revolutions of empires,—the wars,—the battles,—the victories,—the ruin and devastation of provinces and kingdoms: they now seem to have succeeded each other with rapidity like the acts and scenes of a tragedy: the recollection of them is like a dream.—What will be the few days that you have yet to live? will they prove, do you think, more substantial than those that are passed? Years appear long in the prospective view: but no sooner are they commenced than they are ended; they seem to vanish in an instant. Reflect a moment on the state of things such as they were in your younger years, and examine the changes that have taken place:—new scenes have appeared;—new personages have arisen on the stage;—new subjects call forth either your censures, your praises, or your

denisions;—a new world has insensibly stolen upon you, before you perceived the week of the former one:—all things press forward with you, and like you,—a torrent,—which nothing can resist, sweeps all before it into the vast gulf of eternity:—our forefathers traced the way for us yesterday, and to-morrow we shall do the same for those who are to come after us;—the face of the universe changes incessantly;—the living take possession of the spoils of the dead, and, in the next instant, step into the same grave;—nothing is permanent on the earth:—God alone remains always the same: the torrent of time, which sweeps away each succeeding generation, rolls at his feet; and with indignation he beholds those weak mortals, who, borne down by the rapidity of its course, insult him as they pass by, place their whole happiness in the enjoyment of that single instant, and

with unconcern fall into the hands of his justice. Oh! where are the wise amongst us? says the apostle. Would not that sacred name be prostituted, were we to bestow it on the man who forgets what he is, and what he will be quickly, although, perhaps, in other respects, he may be capable of governing the whole universe?

And yet, my beloved, what impression does the instability of human things make on your minds? What effect has been produced by the death of your friends,—of your relations,—and of your acquaintance? You grieved perhaps for a short time; and then you hastened to take possession of their spoils, without once reflecting that the same fate awaited yourselves: you resemble the foolish soldier, who, in the heat of battle, at the moment when his companions are falling on every side, seizes eagerly the spoils of the slain, and is no sooner cloathed

with them, than a mortal blow deprives him of his new-acquired ornaments and his life. Thus the son closes the eyes of his father, performs his funeral obsequies, enters into possession of his wealth and property, and returns more busied, more delighted with his new acquirements, than affected by the exhortations of a dying parent, or convinced of the vanity of all created things, by the sight of a spectacle which reminded him of his own nothing, and announced to him the instability of his own mortal existence: so far from being alarmed for his own safety by the example of those who are cut off before his eyes, he becomes more attached to the world than before, and begins to form plans and devise projects with as great eagerness as if he was to continue in possession for ever.

Oh! my beloved friends, make use of your reason: do not blindfold

yourselves; but consider calmly and deliberately the reflections, which common sense alone will suggest on the uncertainty of death.

First, since there is not a year,—not a day,—not an hour but may prove your last, it is folly to attach yourselves to that, which, perhaps, you will possess only for an instant, and to lose the only good which you might possess for ever.

Secondly, since the hour of death is uncertain, you ought to die daily; that is, you ought to live as if you were immediately to die; to perform all your actions with as great perfection as if you were immediately to appear before the great tribunal; and, since the future time is not at your disposal, to husband the present in such a manner as not to need the future to make reparation for it.

Lastly, since the hour of death is uncertain, you ought not to defer

your repentance. If you had unknowingly swallowed a deadly poison, would you defer the remedy which ought to be taken immediately, as the only means of preventing its deleterious effects? This is precisely your case. Take your precautions, then, immediately: you have death within you, for sin is death: apply the remedy instantly: the present moment is every thing to him who is not certain of the next: the poisonous draft which has infected your souls must soon operate: the goodness of God is ready to administer relief; make haste, therefore; apply to him for it ere it is too late. Let it not be said that exhortations are necessary to influence or determine you in a case like this. Is it necessary to exhort the wretched mariner in the midst of a storm, to exert his utmost efforts to avoid the shipwreck which threatens him? Your last hour is at hand: in the twinkling

of an eye you will be summoned before the judgment-seat of God: the few moments, that you have yet to live, may be profitably employed: the greater number of those, whom you see drop into the grave, suffered them to escape; and will you imitate their folly? If so, you will be surprised by death, in the same manner as they were: you will die like them, before you have begun to live well. The ministers of God admonished them of their danger, and they would not take the alarm: we admonish you; and if you imitate their imprudence, what reason can there be for supposing that you will not at some future unhappy moment share in their misfortune?

These, my beloved, are the reflections which the uncertainty of death ought to excite in your souls. Give them your serious consideration, for your salvation is at stake. Beg of God that he would pour forth his Holy Spi-

rit on you, and dispel the shades of darkness in which you are sitting: that he would convince you of the dangers of your state, and give you grace so to live, as to be constantly in readiness to obey his summons, and appear before him.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DEATH.

When Jesus came nigh to the gate of the city (of Naim) *behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*

Luke vii. 12.

From the gospel of last Sunday.

FROM this gospel I took occasion, last Sunday, to inculcate the necessity of being always prepared for death, on account of the uncertainty of the time of its approach. We will now, if you please, consider

the certainty of death, and prove the necessity of making it the frequent subject of your thoughts, and of banishing far from you that sadness and melancholy, which the recollection of it too often instils into the minds of men.

Man does not love to reflect on his own inanity. The recollection of his last end humbles his pride, calls forth his love of life, strikes at the roots of his passions, and overwhelms his mind with uneasiness and melancholy. To die:—to be snatched away from the enjoyment of all created things—to enter the unexplored abyss of eternity —to become a corpse—the food of worms—a loathsome and frightful object to all mankind—a hideous inhabitant of the grave; the very thought of these things makes us shudder with affright, chills our blood, and imbitters every pleasure of life. We cannot fix our imagination steadfastly on the dis-

mal spectacle that presents itself before us: we recoil from it with horror, we fly from every thing that reminds us of it: we carry our fears to an excess sometimes bordering on superstition; we imagine that we see death on every side of us, and for that reason we endeavour to conceal it always from our sight.

Such fears would be excusable in the heathen who knows not God; because he considers death as the greatest of all calamities; and can expect nothing beyond the grave; and as he lives without hope, so he must die without consolation. But that death should appear so terrible to the Christian—the child of the promises, and that this dread of its approach should be an inducement to him to banish it from his thoughts is at once astonishing and inexcusable.

For, my beloved, although it be natural and reasonable that you should

stand in fear of death, yet, since it is certain that death will sooner or later be your portion, I cannot conceive why this fear and dread should be considered as a sufficient reason for not making it the subject of your thoughts in order to be prepared for it. On the contrary, reason seems to dictate that the more serious the evil is with which you are threatened, the more necessary it is that you should not lose sight of it, and that you should adopt every precaution that would guard you against a surprise. What! shall it be said, that the more you are terrified and alarmed, the more indolent and careless you are? or that the excess of your fears has banished from your mind that salutary fear, which is the beginning of wisdom, and which will cause you to fear nothing, nor even to think of the object that affrights you? Where is the man who is tranquillized and encouraged by too lively a sense of dan-

ger? Were you walking in a narrow and rugged path, with a precipice on each side, would you place a bandage over your eyes, that you might not behold the danger, and that your head might not be turned by the view of the deep abyss into which you are likely to fall? Ah! my brethren, the grave is open under your feet: you know it: you are terrified: and will you, instead of taking the precautions which religion provides to prevent you from falling into it unprepared and unwarned, will you cover your eyes, and indulge in every festive amusement, in order to effacc the terrifying idea from your minds? will you, in imitation of certain wretched victims of the pagan worship, run to the pile that is prepared for you, blindfold, covered with flowers, and surrounded by the votaries of mirth and jollity, on purpose that you might not reflect on the fatal term to which the procession is hastening, and

that you may not behold the altar, that is, the bed of death, on which you are speedily to be immolated?

If it were possible that you could retard the approach of death, by banishing it from your thoughts, your fears would be excusable. But whether you think on it or not, death is always advancing towards you, and it will most undoubtedly arrive at the appointed time. What advantage is it, therefore, to fly from the reflection? Will this diminish the danger? No: it will encrease it: you will be more in danger of being taken by surprise. Do you diminish the horrors of death by concealing it from your view? Ah! the sting of death is not to be blunted by such a procedure. — Were you to familiarize yourselves with the thought, your weak and timid minds would become habituated to it: by degrees you would be enabled to look steadfastly on it, and to meet it without fear, or

at least, to meet it with resignation and peace of mind. Danger that is long foreseen does not create astonishment: death is formidable only when it is concealed from the sight: it is then only to be dreaded when it comes unexpected.

But supposing that the frequent recollection of your last hour were to cause sensations of fear and sadness in your minds, would any serious consequence ensue? "Such gloomy, melancholy thoughts," you say, "might bring on too much despondency, and, in the end, perhaps, might wholly deprive you of your reason." Vain pretext: have you never reflected that there have been an immense multitude of faithful souls who seasoned every action with the thoughts of death; who discovered in that awful meditation the most powerful means of restraining their passions, and the most urgent motives to fervour and perseverance:

that there have been a host of illustrious penitents, who may be said, in a manner, to have buried themselves alive, that their minds might be occupied with no other object; and that there have been innumerable saints, who, like the apostle, died daily, to the end that they might not die eternally? And did these gloomy, melancholy thoughts deprive them of their reason? They undoubtedly were of opinion that this world was no other than a place of banishment; that the riches and pleasures of this life were not more substantial than a dream; and that salvation was their great and only business: but was this the privation of reason? happy folly! I might exclaim: why are not we of the number of these wise fools? But what is that reason which you would be deprived of? You would be deprived of that carnal, haughty, corrupted reason which induces you to favour the passions, to

prefer the shadow before the substance, to love vanity rather than wisdom, and to seek your consolation here rather than hereafter. But as for that wise, that Christian maxim, that prudence of the serpent, that wisdom, which elevates the soul far above the reach of all sublunary things, it is acquired only by continually meditating on our last end.

"If you were to pursue this method," you add, "it would be sufficient to make you dissolve every connection, quit every pursuit, and drive you into extremes." My beloved brethren, it would cause you to renounce the world, to fight against your irregular inclinations, to recover from your spiritual disorders, and to lead a chaste, regular, and Christian life. This is the effect that it would produce; and this is what the world calls extremes. At all events, do not be afraid of being hurried by your fervour beyond the

bounds of prudence: you will never offend on that side: you are little acquainted with your own nature, and with the obstacles which flesh and blood will throw before you, if you apprehend that you will be guilty of indiscretion in your progress towards Christian perfection. Only begin: your first fervour will soon cool: tepidity and indifference are the only rocks that you have to fear: take your precautions to escape these, and advance boldly and resolutely. But suffer not yourselves to be so grossly imposed upon as to be induced to neglect the service of God, through fear of serving him too faithfully. It is not thus that you act in your temporal concerns. Be consistent: you acknowledge that you cannot do too much for the acquisition of the things of this world; acknowledge, then, with the same candour, that you cannot do too much for the acquisition of the good things of eternity.

2. Moreover, by banishing from your minds the thoughts of death, on account of the gloomy ideas which they excite, you are guilty of ingratitude to God, and reject a blessing which he intended should contribute to your sanctification. How many are there who affect to despise death, who pride themselves on their indifference about its approach, and who consider it as nothing more than the annihilation of their existence. How many Christians, even, are there, of learning and abilities, who employ their thoughts during life in hardening themselves into constancy and serenity of mind at their last hour; a conduct as disgraceful to reason as the most abject timidity: how many, who are so impressed with the false ideas of honour and courage, as to rush precipitately to combat in the face of the most imminent danger, without once reflecting on the fate that probably hangs over them: how many,

who from a turn of mind, too light and trivial to admit of the least serious consideration, pass their whole lives, without once deliberately reflecting that they are to die! It is, therefore, a singular mercy that God has given these thoughts such an ascendancy over your minds: it is, undoubtedly, by the means of them that he wishes to draw you to himself. You little reflect what it is that you hazard, when you endeavour to dispel the salutary fears which seem to overwhelm you: you, perhaps, are rejecting the only means that can facilitate your return to God: it seems as if you were angry with your Benefactor for the benefits he is pleased to confer upon you; and as if there were something to reproach yourselves within your inability to get rid of it. Oh! tremble lest the gift should be withheld from you, and your hearts should be hardened. The gift, that is not only despised, but rejected

as an evil, is quickly succeeded by the indignation, or, at least, the displeasure of the Giver. If he should impart to you that much desired tranquillity at the sight of death; the solemn obsequies of a funeral would then no longer throw a gloom over your spirits, or interrupt your pleasures: you would then be able to fix your eyes on a corpse, and on the criminal object of your meretricious affections alternately; and you might secretly applaud yourselves for the courage and consolation with which you conquered your former fears and alarms.—But, my beloved, what a state would this be for a Christian, who has no other important business than to prepare himself for eternity! Endeavour, therefore, to reap the advantage of this sensibility, while it is in your power. Collect around you the objects that are calculated to remind you of death, now that they are capable of disturbing the peaceful reign

of your passions. Walk over the tombs of your relatives and friends; and meditate on the vanity of all things here below: question their departed souls, and ask what are the fruits which they reap in the darksome land of death from all their former pleasures and riches: open in spirit their graves; and see to what a state their bodies—their former dear companions, and their idols, are now reduced: Oh! the sight is too shocking to look upon—a mass of worms and corruption. Such as they are, you yourselves will quickly be. Imagine, for a moment, that you are stretched on the bed of sorrow, struggling in the pangs of death; that your members are benumbed, and seized with a mortal chill; that your tongue is motionless, your eyes fixed and covered with a confused dimness; that your friends and relatives are assembled round you, offering up their unavailing supplications for your recovery, and

redoubling your sorrows and fears by their tender sighs, and by their floods of tears; that the minister of the Lord is by your side, holding in his hand the sacred emblem of your redemption, now your only refuge, and speaking to you words of faith, of hope, and of contrition. Let your imagination dwell on this instructive, this interesting meditation: contemplate yourselves agonizing in the pangs of this last conflict, and giving no other signs of life than the convulsions which announce your approaching dissolution: the whole world is fled from you: honours, and riches, and pleasures are gone for ever: you are accompanied only by your works, and on the point of appearing before the dread tribunal of the Deity.—My beloved, this is not an illusory description of your future state: it is the history of all those who die before your eyes daily; and it will shortly be applicable to you. Call to

mind, then, this awful moment: it will arrive, and that perhaps in a short time; instantly, perhaps. At all events, it is certain that it will arrive; and the only consolation you can then receive must arise from having made your whole lives a study and preparation for a good death.

3. Were we to examine more minutely into the cause of these excessive fears, we should probably discover that they originate, for the most part, in the terfors of a guilty conscience. In general it is not death that is feared: it is the justice of God beyond the grave; it is the dread of a miserable eternity. Purify your souls, therefore; expiate your past offences: admit God into your hearts: avoid every thing that can expose you to his anger and indignation: put yourselves in such a state as to be able to look forward with confidence to his mercies after death. Then you will behold the approach of your last hour with less disquietude

and alarm; and the sacrifice of the world and of your passions, which you have already made, will enable you to offer him the sacrifice of your life with placid resignation and joy, whenever he shall be pleased to call for it.

For, my brethren, what is there in death that can dismay the just man? From what will it separate him? From a world which he has renounced, which will be destroyed, and of which none but the wicked are enamoured:—from riches, which he does not covet, which are not possessed without danger, and which cannot impart felicity:—from his family and friends, who will quickly follow him:—from his body, which has been his domestic enemy, which he has been necessitated to chastise, and to keep in strict subjection. And what will death give him in return for these losses? It will put him in possession of unchangeable blessings, which no one can take from him;—of ineffable

pleasure, which he will enjoy without fear or disquietude;—of God himself, whom he will possess for all eternity;—it will deliver him from his passions;—it will settle in his soul an unalterable peace; and it will unite him to the society of the happy and just in the kingdom of heaven. To such a soul death is a triumph and a gain.

In fact, death is the only cheering prospect, the only hope that consoles the just man during the time of his pilgrimage on earth. If he be visited with afflictions, he knows that his last hour is at hand; that the short and transitory tribulations of this life will be succeeded by an eternal weight of glory; and the thought of this inspires him with patience, courage, and joy. If he be fainting under the yoke of Jesus, and, as it were, yielding under the pressure of the multiplied duties of the gospel, he considers that the day of the Lord is approaching, that his eternal reward is nearly within his reach; and he is in-

vigorated with renewed strength, and enabled to walk on with alacrity and speed. Dearly beloved, said the apostle to the first Christians, the time is short, the day is at hand, the Lord is nigh. Rejoice, therefore: I say unto you again, rejoice. This was the consolation of these persecuted, injured, proscribed men, who were trodden under foot, and treated as the outcasts of mankind, who were a parable of reproach to the Jews, and a scorn to the Gentiles. They knew that their tears would be wiped away in death, and that mourning, and grief, and pain would then be no more: they knew this, and their sufferings were alleviated and sweetened by the thought of it. Ah! if an angel from heaven had appeared to these generous confessors of the faith, and assured them that the Lord had exempted them from death, and given them immortality upon earth, their faith would have been weakened, and their

constancy exposed to the severest trials: they would have lost their only hope and consolation.

Perhaps you see nothing remarkable in this conduct, because you imagine that death must appear desirable to men labouring under such accumulated miseries and afflictions. But you mistake the cause of their sorrows. They grieved and mourned, not on account of persecutions and sufferings, for these were their joy and consolation, and they gloried, like the apostle, in tribulations; but they grieved and mourned on account of their distance from their beloved Jesus: this was the cause of their tears: this it was that made death desirable. While we are in the body, says St. Paul, we are absent from the Lord. Piety consists in ardent desires of being reunited to Jesus our head, in longing for that happy moment when we shall be incorporated with the elect in that mystical body which has

been formed from the beginning of the world out of every tribe, and tongue, and nation. During our abode on earth, we are like branches separated from the tree,—like strangers wandering in a foreign land,—like captives in confinement waiting impatiently for their deliverance,—like children banished, for a time, from their father's house,—like members separated from the body. Now that our Lord is ascended into heaven, it is there alone that we can have our consolation: there alone is our true country, and thither we must hasten as to the place of enjoyment and rest.

To the just man, my beloved, death is a most desirable object. When his last hour is arrived, he shuts his eyes, without regret, to a world which he has always despised: he takes his last farewel with joy of all that is earthly and mortal: he leaves nothing behind him that he regrets the loss of.

If he be taken away in the midst of his days, he does not repine; or rather, he pours forth his soul in acts of thanksgiving to his Deliverer, who thus abridges his time of trial, who exacts only half of the debt as the price of his salvation, and consummates his sacrifice in a short time, lest his heart should be seduced by a longer residence in the midst of a corrupt world. His self-denials and austerities, which, at the time, were so painful to flesh and blood, are now his sweetest consolation. Every thing vanishes from his sight, except what he has done for God. His riches, his honours, his friends, and relatives, all forsake him, all but his works: they, indeed, remain; and they console him. Oh! how is he transported with joy at the thought that he never placed his trust in man, but that his whole confidence was in the Lord, who alone continues for ever, and in whose embraces he will quickly ex-

perience that felicity and peace, which the world, with all that it possesses, could never impart. — Thus, unconcerned about the past, despising what is present, and delighted with the thoughts of what is to come: beholding, as it were, the bosom of Abraham open to receive him, and the Son of Man seated at the right hand of his Father, holding in his hand the crown of immortality, he sleeps in the Lord: he is carried by angels to the mansions of the blessed, and he returns to the happy place from whence he came.— Oh! may we die the death of the saints; and may our last end be like unto theirs.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE OBLIGATION INCUMBENT ON ALL OF LEADING A HOLY LIFE.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. . . . . . Matt. xxii. 37.

THIS, my brethren, is the great commandment of the law: on this foundation the whole edifice of Christian piety must be raised. No virtue, no good work can be deserving of an eternal reward, unless it be seasoned with love. Necessary as is the observance of this precept, there

is not one that is less practised. When we assert that it is incumbent on every Christian, in whatever state of life he may be, to love God with his whole heart, that is to say, to fix his whole heart and affections on God, to consult his glory in all things, to love no creature, not even himself, his friend, his wife or children, to his prejudice; to be ready to make every sacrifice rather than offend him; to employ all the powers of his mind on him, and not to suffer the cares and solicitudes, the delights and pleasures of this world, to avert his thoughts from him; to exert his whole strength in his service, and to embrace every means, however laborious, of increasing this love of God in his soul: when, I say, we declare that it is incumbent on every Christian to love and serve God in this manner, and that there is no true piety without it, we are told that such morality cannot be practised in the

world, and that we require too much. This is the answer we receive, and these are the pretexts by which too many, who call themselves Christians, endeavour to justify the irregularities of their conduct. I have no doubt but a little insight into the merit of these pretexts will convince you how little, against the positive injunctions of God, all such reasoning as this is to be depended upon.

It is said, in the first place, that people in the world must live like the world; that, were they to consult only the glory of God, and make him the chief object of their desires and thoughts, they would neglect the relative duties which they owe to themselves and families; that we condemn the world without being acquainted with it; that the mode of conduct we prescribe borders on ridiculous singularity; that every individual must save his soul by being conformed to the

state in which he is placed; and that it is not consonant with reason to exact the same rigorous attention to the service of God from the man who is engaged in business, or in a public life, as from him who is wholly dedicated to the duties of religion.

In answer to this specious mode of reasoning, I must beg you to observe that the duties and obligations, which we lie under in consequence of our belief in the gospel of Jesus, and of which we shall have to render an account to God, are of two kinds: those, for instance, which belong to the separate states and conditions of men, such as the duties of a pastor, a magistrate, a subject, a parent, a servant, &c.; and those which are inseparable from our baptism, and are essentially requisite in all those who have been regenerated in Jesus Christ, without distinction of potentate or subject, master or servant, men of the world, or those who have

abandoned it. Now, my brethren, I ask, are you Christians in one state, and not in another? Have we not all the same gospel, the same hope? Are we not all members of the mystical body of Jesus, disciples of the cross, and strangers on earth? Can the duties of any state annul the essential duties of religion? Did our Lord deliver one gospel to the world, and another to the recluse? Or, in the gospel which he did deliver, are there any exceptions in favour of the world; any special immunity; any protecting clauses; any thing, in short, to shew that the severity of its maxims were not intended for it? He, indeed, declared that the world would oppose these holy maxims, and that it should be judged by them: if, therefore, it is to be judged by the gospel, the gospel is its law, and it certainly would not be condemned on account of any opposition to its maxims, if these maxims

were not strictly obligatory. Never pretend, therefore, to justify yourselves, by saying that you live in the midst of the world. Magdalen did the same, and yet she did not pretend to be exempted from the obligation of doing penance, and devoting the remainder of her days to the service of God. David was in the world, and even on a throne; and yet he did not suppose this was a sufficient reason to induce him to moderate the excess of his grief, and to abate the rigour of his austerities. Esther, Judith, our pious king and confessor Edward, and the illustrious Margaret of Scotland, were of the world, and lived in the midst of its splendors; and yet they did not imagine that they were authorized to be worldly-minded, sensual, indecorous in their dress, dissolute in their morals, and lovers of all the loose and fashionable amusements of the age, or at liberty, in the slightest

manner, to infringe upon any, even the minutest precepts of the gospel.

2. My brethren, whence arose the distinction in the Church of God between those who are of the world, and those who are not? It originated in the corruption of morals, and in the decay of piety. In the first ages, there was no such distinction: all, all equally renounced the world. The ministers of the altar, the holy confessors, the chaste virgins, the faithful matrons, the whole body of Christians, even they who were of the *household of Cæsar*, separated themselves in affection from, and had nothing in common with the world: they knew that the world was adverse to the gospel, and they considered that it was of equal import to be a Christian, and to renounce the world. If you are of the world, it is your misfortune, instead of a justification of your conduct.

Besides, what is it you pretend to

claim, when you say that you are of the world? That you are not obligated to submit to so rigorous a course of penance as others are? If the world were the seat of innocence, the asylum of virtue, the refuge of purity, holiness, and temperance, you would have some reason on your side.—Or do you pretend that prayer is less necessary? If the world were not so replete with danger, as solitude; if temptations were not so violent, nor seduction so common; and if less grace was required in it for the attainment of Christian perfection, your plea might be admitted.—Or do you suppose that temporary retirement is not necessary in the world? If the conversations in which you engage were more pious, and the society more innocent; if every thing that you saw and heard tended to elevate your minds to God, to strengthen your faith, excite your fervour, and contribute to your advance-

ment towards perfection, your reasoning would be just.—Or do you imagine that it requires less labour to merit heaven in the world, than in retirement? Ah! if you had fewer passions to resist, or fewer obstacles to surmount; if you were encouraged by the example of the world to be obedient to the gospel, to be humble, to forgive injuries, to despise vanity, to be resigned in affliction, and cheerful in suffering, then you might come forward with confidence, and justify yourselves. But nothing of all this is the truth. The world is the very reverse in every respect: and consequently, instead of being exempted from any of the gospel duties by living in the world, you are thereby constrained to fulfil them with more exactness, and with greater fervour.

3. But you say that some distinction must nevertheless be made, and that greater perfection must be requir-

ed in the cloistered recluse, than in the man of the world. I readily acknowledge that a distinction ought to be made; but it is not in favour of that side which you imagine. The measure of piety that is requisite for each one, proportionate to the dangers with which he is surrounded. In solitude the dangers are few, and consequently a weaker degree of virtue may be sufficient to resist them; but in the world, temptations are most violent, and allurements to pleasure most incessant; and on that account the most fervent piety, and the most determined fidelity are requisite, in order to insure the victory over them.

But that I may refute at once an error that is so prevalent, and so injurious to Christian piety, I will ask what were the motives that induced the founders of religious orders to assemble people together, and to subject them to rules of such severe discipline? Did

they pretend to prescribe a new gospel to their followers? or make additions to the severe maxims which Jesus proposes to the rest of the faithful?

Their motives were these. When the whole body of Christians formed, in the midst of a corrupted world, one assemblage of saints: when women displayed the bright lustre of piety by their modesty and chastity: when each individual of the faithful shone like a star in the midst of the firmament of a degenerate world, and by the purity and integrity of his moral conduct compelled even Pagans to respect the sanctity of his religion; then it was useless to retire into solitude; the Church itself was the asylum of virtue, and the path, in which the generality of Christians walked, was the path which led to heaven. But when Christian charity began to cool, and fervour diminished in proportion as the profession of the Christian faith was extend-

ed; when the world itself embraced the doctrine of the gospel, and introduced into the Church its inseparable attendants — immorality and remissness, then it was that the chosen vessels of grace, beholding the rapidity with which the deluge of iniquity was inundating the fair inheritance of the Lord, and perceiving that the lives of the generality of Christians were no longer regulated according to the maxims of the gospel, sought an asylum in retirement, established houses of refuge in the wild and barren deserts, and invited the fervent and the timid to join with them, and endeavour by flight to escape the general corruption. The founders of these numerous communities had no other motive in view than that of perpetuating the primitive spirit of Christianity, and of facilitating to their disciples the observance of the gospel maxims;—those maxims, I mean, which all, even in the midst of

the world, are obligated to observe. They were, I allow, subjected to many rules, and restraints and privations, to which it is not necessary that people in the world should be subjected: but they were subjected to all these, for no other reason than that they might be enabled to fulfil with greater ease the precepts which we are all obliged to fulfil. Thus, for example, they were enjoined to observe perpetual continency (a duty which is not imposed on all); but their motive was, that they might observe with greater ease the virtue of purity and chastity, which is a general duty: they were subjected, in like manner, to the law of silence at stated times; but this was with no other view than that they might be more securely guarded against the dangers of idle and foolish conversation, and against the dangers of detraction and calumny; dangers, against which all Christians ought to be guard-

ed. They, moreover, were required to renounce all that they possessed, and to embrace the state of poverty and abjection: but this was only that they might more easily acquire that poverty of spirit, and that contempt of riches and of all transitory things, which ought to be acquired by all. They were, likewise, immured within the walls of retirement; but it was only that they might be farther removed from the pomps and pleasures of the world, which we all renounced in baptism. Lastly, they were subjected to severe fasts, to watchings, and self-denials. But why was this done? why, for the purpose of subduing the rebellious inclinations of the flesh, which we are all obliged to subdue, and to make it subservient to the spirit:-the law of penance under which they lived, was the law of the gospel, and it is our law likewise: they lived in solitude, like strangers and pilgrims on earth:

had they continued in the midst of the world with the same mortified and Christian spirit which carried them into retirement, and accompanied them there, they would have done the same.

From this statement we must draw the following conclusion: that we have fewer helps than they, and the same duties to fulfil; that we do not actually renounce the world, and that we are obliged, like them, to be poor in spirit, and to use all temporal things as if we used them not: that, although we are surrounded by all the allurements of sensuality, and the greater number engaged in the holy state of matrimony, we are yet obliged to possess the vessels of our bodies in purity and holiness, and to make a covenant with our eyes not to think of dangerous objects: that, although we are seated in the midst of the greatest luxuries of the table, we are obliged to keep a strict watch over the sensual appetite, and to observe,

as well as the most mortified hermit, the frugality enjoined by the gospel: that, without being subjected to the law of silence, we are obliged to place a guard of circumspection over our lips, and to regulate our words according to the rules of justice and charity: that, although living in the world, we must form as it were a solitude in our hearts, where the God of peace may reside, and where we ourselves may, from time to time, retire from the noise and dissipation of the world, in order to pour forth our souls before him; in a word, that, although we are not enjoined to perform the same acts of mortification as they, we are nevertheless obliged to bear in our bodies the marks of Christ crucified, to deny ourselves incessantly, and to do penance in proportion to our iniquities.

Let it not, therefore, be said that the austerities of the gospel are not practicable unless we renounce the world,

and fly into the desert. Is the gospel to be followed only by the recluse? Are chastity, temperance, poverty of spirit, contempt of the world, and self-denial, virtues that can be practised only in the cloister? This is certainly an erroneous supposition. Ah! my beloved, it is a work of much greater difficulty, to attain salvation in the midst of the world, than in the shades of retirement. It is much more difficult to be chaste in the midst of danger; humble in the midst of honours and dignities; temperate in the midst of luxuries; mortified and penitent in the midst of continual allurements to pleasure; meek and patient in the midst of the incessant jarrings of interest and passion; and yet, if we are deficient in any of these points, our souls are lost. Truly, my God! might we say, that the austerities of severe discipline are less necessary in the bosom of retirement, because less cir-

cumspection is required when the danger is removed to a greater distance; whereas they are indispensable in the world, where, on account of the multiplied and incessant dangers which surround us, piety cannot be maintained without the strictest vigilance and the minutest attention.

Nevertheless, my beloved, notwithstanding the peace and security of a cloistered life, notwithstanding the precautions with which the pious founders endeavoured to close every avenue against the world and the devil, those holy souls trembled at the thought of their own weakness, and watched and prayed without ceasing, lest they should fall into temptation: it was with difficulty that they resisted the violence of their own innate corruption, and on numberless occasions were they exposed to the danger of losing in an instant the fruits of a long life of recollection and penance. And we, stationed as we are

in the midst of perils, we flatter ourselves that we are privileged to live in greater ease, and to indulge in greater liberties! We, surrounded on every side by all the allurements of vanity and pleasure, encompassed about by all the snares of the devil and hell, we imagine that we are in a state of comparative security; that extraordinary exertion is not required from us; and that indolence and tepidity, and self-gratification, will not contribute to hasten our destruction! But, my God! with what appearance of truth can it be said, that the man who is exposed in the midst of the boisterous ocean has less reason to provide for his safety, than the man who is sheltered from the winds and waves?

When David, in the desert and barren mountains, whither he had fled in order to escape the fury of Saul, proposed to his followers to issue forth from their dens and caverns, and at-

tack the Philistines, they replied: We are not secure even in this wilderness; we are in hourly danger of falling into the hands of our enemy; how much more if we descend into the plains and attack the Philistines? The same words might the pious inhabitants of the deserts address to you: 'We are seized with fear even in our solitude: we are a continual temptation to ourselves, even in the security of the asylums into which we were led by a merciful Providence in our earlier years: we here work out our salvation with trembling: we pray: we mourn: we perceive that retirement itself would be prejudicial to our innocence, were we not to labour incessantly to acquire a constant recollection of spirit, and to mortify our passions. And do you pretend to persuade us that we should have less to fear, that we stand less in need of watchfulness, of circumspection, and of prayer, if we resided, like

you, in the midst of the world, surrounded by so many snares, and exposed to the dangerous influence of such bad example? Penance is our only security even in solitude; and do you imagine that luxury and pleasure would not expose our salvation to danger, in the midst of the world itself?

4. But, my Christian friends, we will no longer insist on your comparing the numberless dangers to which you are exposed in the world, and the precautions of self-denial, of prayer, and of watchfulness, which are requisite in order to overcome them, with the security of the cloister, in which fewer precautions seem to be necessary; we will turn to another subject, and exhort you to compare the history of your lives, and of the irregularities of your past conduct, with that of the holy penitents who inhabit those consecrated abodes; the satisfaction which you owe to God, with that

which they owe to him. Ah! you seem to entertain the idea that these sequestered and guileless Christians, who have borne the yoke of the Lord from their infancy; who have been educated within the precincts of the temple; who, so far from being infected, are unacquainted with the corruption of the world, and whose most criminal imperfections would be almost virtues in you; you seem to entertain the idea that they alone are bound to mourn and weep in sackcloth and ashes, to renounce every sensual enjoyment, and to die daily in the cause of virtue and holiness. At the same time you fondly imagine that you, whose sins have been increasing in number and in enormity from your younger years, who hardly dare to fix your eyes steadfastly on the heap of wrath which you have accumulated, and whose lives have been almost totally alienated from the service of God; you fondly ima-

gine that your duties are much lighter than theirs; that prodigality, pleasures, theatrical exhibitions, immodest dress, sensuality, and excess, are not so criminal in you, as in them; that heaven may be purchased by you at an easier rate; that tears, fastings, watchings, and penitential austerities, are for them only, and not for you; that they are obliged to suffer, to pray, to mourn, to chastise their flesh, and that you are privileged to spend your days in indolence, and in the pleasing gratification of the sensual appetite. Good God! how rash, how inconsiderate, how unwarrantable will the conduct of the sinner appear, when he shall be judged according to the unerring rules of truth and justice!

Look, therefore, to yourselves, Christian brethren. Do not be led astray by the flattering idea that you will experience greater mildness from your Judge at the great trial, than your

more guiltless brethren. The gospel is your law: by that you will be judged. Think seriously on this whilst you have time: regulate your lives according to its maxims: be faithful, wanting in nothing: for it is thus only that you can make yourselves acceptable to God, and insure to yourselves the possession of that ineffable bliss which he has prepared for those who love him with sincerity and truth.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DETRACTION.

And behold some of the scribes said within themselves, He blasphemeth.

Matt. ix. 3.

THERE is no vice, perhaps, which Christians are more ingenious in concealing from their own eyes, and which is attended with more irreparable consequences than that which the scribes were guilty of on this occasion, I mean the vice of detraction. It is a vice which pervades every department of the Christian world: it penetrates into the asylums of devo-

tion and piety, as well as into the assemblies of riot and dissipation. It is a vice with which almost every tongue is defiled, and every life contaminated.

Were I to give a general description of the baseness, the cruelty, and the irretrievable mischief incident to this vice, without entering into a refutation of the pretexts which are alledged by all in jutification of themselves, I should, perhaps, lead you astray; and instead of opening your eyes to behold the guilt which you yourselves have probably contracted, induce you to believe that the crime is of a nature too odious and too enormous to be committed without scruple or remorse.

In order, therefore, that you may be able to examine yourselves minutely on this head, I will expose the guilt which is contracted on those occasions when it is supposed that detraction is innocent, namely, when the faults censured

seem to be of too trifling a nature to attach guilt on the censurer; secondly, when the public notoriety of the facts seems to preclude the possibility of farther injury; and thirdly, when zeal for truth, and for the honour and glory of God seems to require that notice should be taken of the abuses which are committed by the more dissolute among our Christian brethren. The subject is important: and that nothing may be lost for want of room to expatiate as amply as possible upon it, I shall confine myself at present to the first of the three heads, or particulars, which I have just mentioned, reserving the two others for your consideration on the following Sunday.

1. The tongue, according to the apostle James, is a devouring fire, a world of iniquity, a restless evil, an overflowing source of deadly poison, (*James* iii. 6, 8.) Had it been my intention to describe the malignity of

detraction, these are the epithets which I would have applied to the tongue of the detractor. I would have said, that it was a devouring fire, which spread ruin and desolation on every side; which spared nothing sacred or profane; which blackened what it could not consume; and which was as dreadful in its consequences when covered over and working in secret, as when raging with open violence.—I would have said that it was a world of iniquity;—a composition of many vices;—of pride, which discovered a mote in the eye of another, and saw not the beam in its own;—of envy, which repining at the prosperity of others, and defamed their character to lessen their enjoyments;—of duplicity, which calumniated others when absent, and flattered them when present;—of barbarity, which stabbed, as it were, an unresisting brother behind his back;—of scandal, which occasioned the guilt

of sin in every individual who gave ear to the detraction; of injustice, and robbery, which took away by violence from a neighbour that which was the most dear to him.—I would have said that it was a restless evil, which destroyed the bands of society, kindled dissentions in kingdoms, cities, and families, dissolved the most intimate friendships, spread disorder and confusion on every side, and banished far from it the amiable virtues of peace, meekness, and Christian charity. I would have said that it was an overflowing source of deadly poison; that every thing which proceeded from it, and every thing which surrounded it, was infected; that its applauses were suspicious, and even its very silence was expressive; that its gestures, its movements, its looks, all had their separate meanings, and distilled a fatal poison into the hearts of all who had

the misfortune to associate, or, in any manner to come in contact with it.

These would have been the subjects of my discourse, had it been my intention to display before you the enormity of this detestable vice: but, as I before remarked, a general description of this kind would not have its intended effect on your minds: it would shock your feelings, but it would not enable you to discover the share of guilt which you yourselves would have probably contracted. It is for this reason that I shall confine my observations to those points which appear less criminal, and lay the subject before you in a light far different from that in which you have been accustomed to view it.

It is too frequently said that the guilt contracted by exposing the trivial faults of your neighbour is of no great consequence; and that, when it is considered that your design is not to

stigmatize your brother, but to indulge a little innocent mirth over failings which do not disgrace him in the eyes of men, the most rigid morality could not reasonably accuse you of a crime. Now let us examine into the nature of this grand argument. You call it *a little innocent mirth;* but, my beloved, is it an *innocent* mirth to be amused at the failings of a fellow member? is it a Christian pleasure that is excited by the rehearsal of crimes which offend the God of Majesty, and for which your neighbour will have to give a strict account hereafter? Jesus declares that guilt is contracted by every idle word, and are not derisions and censures of far greater magnitude? The law pronounces a curse on those who uncover the shame of their brethren; and will not the same malediction attach to those who add to the disclosure, raillery, and insult? The scriptures declare, that to call a brother, in an-

ger, by a certain term of reproach, is a crime of great magnitude; and will not he be guilty of a crime equally great, who makes him the sport and scorn of a mixed assembly? Ah! my brethren, charity does not rejoice at evil in this manner: the man that loves his neighbour as himself, cannot thus amuse himself with his misfortunes.

Are there not other subjects in abundance for conversation? Cannot society be enlivened and animated unless the dearest interets of your brethren are sacrificed for your entertainment? St. Paul admonishes you to edify one another by words of peace and charity. Supposing, therefore, that you were to relate the amiable qualities of your neighbour, and the virtues of those who are gone before you with the sign of faith: supposing that you were to recount the wonderful works of God, the histories of his mercies to mankind; supposing that you were to animate

each other to piety by the consideration of the instability of all earthly things, the emptiness of all worldly enjoyment, and the anxiety and remorse which imbitter the cup of sensual pleasures: supposing that these were the subjects of your conversations, would there not be abundant room for reflection and remark? Would they be too dull, too insipid to rouse your feelings, or animate your souls? These, at least, were the subjects of conversation amongst the primitive Christians; and the joy and consolation, which they inspired, smoothed the rugged paths of affliction, and encouraged them to patience and perseverance in the pursuit of virtue and holiness. If the same subjects do not interest you in the same manner, the reason is, that your hearts are corrupted, and that a reform is essentially requisite for the promoting of your eternal welfare.

You, perhaps, will say, that when you converse about the failings of your neighbour, you are not actuated by envy or malice. But, my beloved, were you to examine, you probably would discover that there are certain individuals whose failings were more generally the topics of your discourse than those of others: and if so, it is more than probable that your real motive is either envy, jealousy, antipathy, malice, or hatred.—But supposing that you are actuated on those occasions merely by levity and indiscretion; do you think that even then you would be excusable in the sight of God? Levity and indiscretion are unbecoming a Christian at all times, and are frequently censured in the holy writings; and will they authorize the vice of detraction? Ah! of what consequence is it to the brother whom you have defamed, whether you were actuated by malice or by indiscretion?

Does the arrow, which is shot at random, cause a less dangerous, a less painful wound, than the one which is designedly pointed at you? Such conduct, my beloved, cannot be justified; for in the whole circle of Christian duties, there is not one that requires more circumspection and prudence: the whole law is included in the virtue of charity; and by transgressing against charity, you transgress against the whole law. It never happens that you speak indiscreetly about yourselves; that you fail in attention to your own honour and reputation: and if you are not as careful in respect to your neighbour's reputation as you are in respect to your own, the reason is, that you have not that love for your neighbour which charity requires.

2. The motive, therefore, for these detractions are not sufficient to excuse you from sin. We will now examine the circumstances that attend them;

and you will see that there is nothing in any of these that can possibly justify them.

You say that the faults which you censure are trivial;—faults that do not diminish his reputation in the eyes of others. Allowing that they are faults of this description, is it not more criminal in you to publish them? The fewer the failings are of any individual, the greater are his claims to your indulgence: he is so much the more respectable; and if you refuse him that respect, you are so much the more inexcusable; and of you it might be said in the words of our Saviour: because your neighbour is good, your eye is evil.

Perhaps, however, the faults are not so trivial as you are willing to suppose: at least, would you call them trivial if you yourselves were accused of them? What are your feelings when you learn that certain imperfections to which

you are subject, — imperfections, I mean, which do not materially affect your reputation, have been introduced into conversation, and treated with ridicule and mirth? Ah! then the insult appears to you intolerable: you magnify every thing: you represent the injury as of serious consequence: you examine into the motives which actuated the authors, and do not hesitate to accuse them of the worst that can disgrace a Christian. In vain do your friends declare that no injury was intended, or done to you: your resentment is carried beyond bounds, and you consider it as a singular act of Christian meekness, if, in compliance to the gospel, you formally forgive it. —Be as delicate of the reputation of your neighbour as of your own, and you will not expose his failings, under pretence that they are insignificant and incapable of affecting his reputation.

But may it not be asked whether you always adhere to the letter of the truth when you introduce these trivial faults to the notice of others; for additions to a tale are not uncommon? Trivial stories require embellishments, else, it is known, they are not worth attending to; and the more trivial they are, the greater embellishments they require. If, therefore, you have recourse to these artifices, if you throw out distant hints, if you pretend to conceal the more important circumstances, if by your motions you intimate that more is to be understood than the sense of the words conveys, the nature of your crime is changed, and instead of incurring the guilt of detraction only, you incur the more odious guilt of calumny.

It is necessary likewise to enquire, not only whether the faults were trivial in themselves, but against whom was the accusation directed. On some

particular points the least reflection thrown out upon the fair sex would be an essential injury,—the most groundless report, a public scandal,—the most trivial jest, an affront,—the least suspicion, an accusation.—Were your accusations directed against a parent, or a superior whom you were bound to honour and respect, you would add to your guilt the crime of ingratitude.—Were you to defame a minister of the altar, who is bound by the sanctity of his profession to a life of greater innocence and purity, you would inflict a deeper wound than if you had defamed an individual in common life. I know that our conversation among men is not always blameless—not always undeserving of reproof; and it can hardly be expected that the world should honour and respect a character which we dishonour ourselves. But, my beloved, our imperfections ought to excite your grief, and not your censures and ridicule.

God frequently chastises the sins of his people by the irregularities of the clergy; he refuses to raise up venerable pastors and zealous ministers, who might stem the torrent of licentiousness and vice; he permits the holy flames of piety and love to be extinguished in the breasts of those whose duty it is to enkindle them in yours; the light, which should enlighten you, to be changed into darkness; the men who ought to be the co-operators of your salvation, to be the promoters of your destruction. These are the severest judgments which God in his wrath inflicts on kingdoms and empires: and would you have reason to glory and exult, were you to observe symptoms of this terrible chastisement in the pastors that are placed over you? And what if they should err? Men are not angels, although encompassed with a dignity which should render them little inferior to them: they are weak and

frail; but their ministry is blameless: at all events, they are the fathers and keepers of your souls; and what child would be justified in any attempt to throw ridicule upon them in exposing their secret failings? It may have happened that your censures were levelled against men who openly espoused the cause of piety, and whose virtues were esteemed by the whole circle of their acquaintance. Perhaps you have intimated, with an air of sarcasm, that genuine piety was not so easily found, that all men have their failings, and that were we able to examine the heart we should discover little difference between the man who is exteriorly virtuous and him who is exteriorly dissolute. By such intimations as these you may have given a bias to the minds of your hearers, and diminished their respect for those men whose piety had hitherto appeared unblemished and sincere in their eyes. Now are these

detractions trivial and unimportant? Ah! the Lord resides in the soul of the just, as he formerly resided in the holy tabernacle: their cause he considers as his own, and he chastises as severely the outrages and affronts which are offered to them, as if they were offered to himself in person. Although they may sometimes lean aside, like the ark of Israel, when conducted by David in triumph into Jerusalem; that is, although they may sometimes betray the weakness of human nature, for there is no virtue so pure and so protected as to be entirely exempt from failings; nevertheless, the Lord is provoked if the officious worldling, like Oza, dare to lift up his hand, and call the attention of the multitude to this irregularity of the moment. In scripture language, they are the apple of his eye: he feels the slightest injury that is offered to them: he will not endure that virtue, which has found admirers even in the most bar-

barous nations, should be treated with derision and scorn by Christians; and if he does not immediately strike the rash defamer, as he formerly dealt with the presumptuous Israelites, he refuses to impart to him the precious gifts of grace and sanctity which he has despised in others; and thus restrains his arm only to inflict the severest judgments on him hereafter.

3. Important, therefore, are these trivial detractions, as you call them, both in their motives and circumstances, we will now examine them in their consequences, and you will perceive that these are far greater than you had imagined, and that they are almost irreparable. The crime of sensuality may be expiated by mortification and penance;—the crime of hatred, by brotherly love;—the crime of injustice, by a full restitution to the injured party;—the crime even of libertinism and impiety, by a religious

and public respect for the faith of your ancestors; but by what virtues are you to expiate the crime of defamation? You, perhaps, disclosed the secret to one only individual; but to whom has it been disclosed since? This individual, probably, had other intimates whom he judged worthy of his confidence: these intimates, considering it, perhaps, as no longer a secret, divulged it to the whole circle of their acquaintance. Each one, probably, added to the tale: each one related it in his best manner, and embellished it with such remarks as were suggested either by his malice or wit. The farther it is extended, the more circumstantial, the more injurious it becomes. Like fire, the sparks of which are scattered by an impetuous wind, it spreads ruin and devastation on every side. The torrent, which was almost impereeptible in its source, is swelled in its progress by the innume-

rable rivulets that flow into it, and at length inundates the whole country. At first it was only a secret anecdote, an imprudent reflection, an ill-natured conjecture; but by additions and misrepresentations it is become a serious matter,—a public and formal disgrace, — a common topic of conversation, — an indelible stain. And how will you repair such a widely-extended scandal? How will you restore to your brother the good name which he has lost? Will you dare to oppose your voice singly against the universal opinion? will you dare to stand alone in his defence? Probably you would not be listened to; or, perhaps, your interference would be attributed to ignorant simplicity; and fresh injuries might be the consequence of your ill-timed panegyrics. What numberless crimes, my brethren, are sometimes occasioned by one only sin of detraction! You will have to

answer for them all: you are the detractor as often as the detraction is repeated; as often as the detraction is heard with pleasure. Good God! these are sins, of which no one knows either the extent or the magnitude, neither can any one ascertain the injury which our neighbour has sustained, the happiness of which he has been deprived, or the restitution of which it is incumbent on the detractor to make. This, indeed, is certain, that the man who is a rock of scandal to his brethren, takes part with the declared enemy of mankind, whose object it is to make void the glorious work of our redemption, and involve us all in one common sentence of irreparable perdition.

Entertain, therefore, a due respect for the reputation of your neighbour, even the same respect which you entertain for your own: disclose no secret failings, — harbour no suspicions,

—form no conjectures. Endeavour to excuse him on all occasions when his reputation is attacked in your presence, and do the same for him which you would wish him to do for you were you in his situation. Thus you will avoid the fatal rock, on which thousands have split and suffered shipwreck; you will draw down the blessing of God, and be favoured with graces which are never imparted to the detractor and calumniator.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DETRACTION.

Speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour; for we are members one of another. . . . . . Eph. iv. 25.

THE admonition of the apostle, in the words of my text, relates to the same subject which occupied your attention last Sunday: *Speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour:* injure no man in words; set a guard upon your lips: be circumspect in all you utter: watch over the reputation of your brother with as

much solicitude as one member of the body watches over the welfare of another; *for we are members one of another.* My remarks to you, last Sunday, upon this subject, were limited to one single point; they were directed to shew that defamation and scandal are not justified by the pretence that the faults we censure are of a trifling nature; I shall now resume the argument, and will endeavour to demonstrate that it is contrary to Christian humility, charity, and justice, to make even the public and known crimes of a neighbour the topics of conversation; and that no plea, not even that of the utmost zeal for the honour and glory of God, can be a sufficient warrant to authorize any individual to speak ill of another.

It is contrary, in the first place, to *Christian humility.* Were you truly sensible of your own wretched state, were your own sins continually before

your eyes, you would have neither leisure nor inclination to remark the faults of others. The greater the publicity is with which the sins of a neighbour are attended, the more your compassion ought to be excited, and the greater reason you have to bless the mercies of the Lord, which have preserved you from the like misfortune. Your crimes, perhaps, are not less enormous than those of your brother; and if your honour and reputation are yet untarnished, it is not owing to any merit of yours; and so far from having any right to glory in the shame of another, you ought to humble yourselves in the sight of Him who beholds your multiplied iniquities, and tremble lest he should spare you in this world, for no other purpose than to inflict severer judgments on you hereafter.

These are the sentiments which Christian humility suggests on those

occasions when the public failings of others are made the subjects of conversation. The example of our Saviour on this head is striking and expressive. When the woman taken in adultery was presented to him, he observed a profound silence; and notwithstanding the certainty and publicity of her guilt, he made no other reply to the malicious and pressing instances of her accusers, than: *He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her*, (John viii. 7.): as if he had said: "it is not for sinners like you to condemn without mercy a fellow culprit; this is a right which is reserved only for him who is without reproof." Attend to the import of these words, my beloved, and adopt them for your rule of conduct. If your neighbour be detected in a crime, turn to yourselves before you pass sentence on him: look into your own interior, ex-

amine whether you yourselves have not contracted guilt equal to that of your neighbour; and if you are without sin, then throw what obloquies you please upon him: but if you discover within you the defilements of sin, as you undoubtedly will, then be silent; it is not for you to condemn your brother. If you transgress in this point, you have reason to fear, that in punishment of your defamations, you yourselves will be delivered into the hands of defamers, and that the shafts of calumny and ridicule will be turned against you. *All that take the sword, shall perish by the sword.* (Matt. xxvi. 52.) If you wound your neighbour's reputation with the sword of detraction, the hour may come when you yourselves will be wounded with the same weapon: and, although you may not have to reproach yourselves at present with the failings which you so liberally censure in others, the time

may be hastening forward, when, left to yourselves in punishment of your uncharitableness, you may be insensibly led to the commission of greater crimes, and may live to see, with unavailing sorrow, what it is to be held up as objects of contempt and derision to those about you.

It is the nature of pride to work its own disgrace. One way or other, it is sure to be humbled. Peter, at the last supper, felt indignant at the idea of betraying his Lord and Master, and was the most eager to discover the man who was to perpetrate the crime: in the space of a few hours he himself fell into the same sin of infidelity against which he had previously declaimed with so much bitterness. There is nothing that more effectually contributes to banish God from the heart, than the malicious pleasure which is enjoyed in scandal and defamation: his mercy cannot

endure that those afflicting examples, which he permits only with the view of reminding us of our own weakness, and of renewing our vigilance, should flatter our pride, and excite our derision and contempt.

The same injury which is offered to Christian humility, by making the faults of a neighbour the topics of our discourse, however public they may be, is offered likewise to Christian charity; for *charity dealeth not perversely,* (1 Cor. xiii. 4.) If the failings which you censure are publicly known, what reason is there for again relating them? Do you wish to express your abhorrence of the conduct of the person you condemn? But what purpose will this answer? He probably will never be informed of your sentiments: and if he should, do you think that he is not already sufficiently humbled? His fault has perhaps been exaggerated by the tongues of malice,

and propagated with such degrading circumstances as to blacken his reputation for ever; and is not this a sufficient punishment? Ah! he is more deserving of your pity, than of your reproaches. But perhaps you had some suspicion beforehand, that, sooner or later, what has happened would come to pass; and now, finding that you were right in your conjecture, you cannot help communicating it to your friends. This, if it is your motive, is indeed a most unchristian motive. What! then you insult and triumph over your fallen brother, merely because you had foreseen his misfortune: or rather, you seek to be glorified and honoured by others for no other reason than because you had judged evil of your neighbour; because you had passed sentence on him before he had committed the crime! And what reason is there for glory in all this? The gospel does not allow you to condemn

your brother even after the offence has been committed; and shall it be allowed you to pass sentence upon him while he is innocent? Ah! if you can so accurately pry into the fate of others, why not look a little more narrowly into your own? Can you not descry something of the heavy judgments that await you, if you do not speedily renounce that spirit of dissipation and gaiety, that love of the world, that itch for defamation and scandal, which possess your souls? Why not exert your prophetic powers on this subject? You may here give full scope to your conjectures, without danger of error; your predictions will be most advantageous to your own welfare; and why not apply your mind to them? Shall your attention be constantly fixed on the mote which is in your brother's eye, and no means be taken to remove the beam which is in your own? Let

not such inconsistency, my beloved, be imputed to you.

But to proceed with our subject. The more the faults of your neighbour are known, the more pressing motives you have to lament the consequences; your brethren are so much the more scandalized; the libertine takes the greater occasion of blaspheming against religion, of strengthening himself in the ways of sin, of propagating the idea that all men are subject alike to failings, and that they who are accounted virtuous owe their reputation to their dexterity in concealing their corruption from the eyes of others: the piety of the weak is so much the more endangered; and more powerful inducements are held out to the wavering Christian to follow his example. These are consequences which ought to excite your tears; and if you have any love for piety and goodness,

the view of these deplorable effects ought to stimulate you to endeavour, as far at least as your silence can effect it, to consign them to oblivion, and blot them for ever from the memory of man. —— But perhaps you will say, that they are now the general topics of discourse, and that as your silence can be of little avail, your speaking about them can be of little consequence. This, my beloved, is not reasoning like Christians. Shall it be allowed you to heap additional infamy and disgrace on your neighbour, because you cannot rescue him from that which he has already endured? to increase the scandal, because you cannot prevent it? to throw the stone at him, and accelerate his ruin, because you see every other person is disposed to do it? Oh no: this is not reasoning, nor acting like Christians, nor like men. Were religion even out of the question, it would be noble, it would

be dignified, to take the part of the unfortunate: it would bespeak greatness of soul, to afford protection to the wretch who is forsaken by the rest of the world. If charity, therefore, did not require you to be silent on these occasions, humanity alone would suggest the propriety of such a mode of conduct.

In the third place, you violate the laws of justice as often as you converse about the failings of your neighbour. We still proceed on the supposition that these failings are publicly known. Now place yourselves in his situation, and tell me whether you would require less delicacy, less humanity from him towards you, merely because your reputation had sustained the greatest injury, and your faults had been divulged to the whole neighbourhood? Tell me whether you would consent that he should take part with the rest, and join in the public cry against you, in

the same manner as you do against him? and if he was to bring forward, in justification of his conduct, the notoriety of the fact, tell me whether such an excuse would not be considered by you as an exaggeration of his offence, rather than as an alleviation of the injury you had sustained?——It would not be amiss for you likewise to enquire whether the author of these reports was not an impostor. There are so many false rumours propagated, and the world is so ready to think evil of any one, that a person cannot be too cautious in giving credit to them. Some owe their origin to the envy and malice of ill designing people: others, to the rancour and animosity of a revengeful mind. Examples of this kind are very common. Others again are occasioned by the indiscretion of individuals, who had no intentions of defaming their neighbour: a word of double meaning, perhaps unintention-

ally spoken, might have been wrongly interpreted: this might have given rise to conjecture, which, passing from mouth to mouth, might have been reported at last as a real fact. Such a thing is by no means impossible, nor is it very improbable. The number of evil reports that arise from mistakes of this kind are very numerous. What could be more strongly attested than the pretended crime of Susanna? She was publicly accused by men venerable for their age and dignity: she was traduced by the whole people as an adultress, as a dishonour to Israel: and yet she was innocent; or rather, it was her innocence alone that was the cause of her disgrace. Our blessed Saviour was publicly calumniated as an impostor, a Samaritan, and a seducer of the people. These calumnies were supported by the authority of the priests and pharisees, men of the first rank and character,—men who were univer-

sally looked upon as the best judges. And do you suppose that any of the multitude were free from sin, who, relying on the publicity and authority of these reports, treated our blessed Lord with indignity, and joined the standard of his enemies to oppose him? On what false grounds, then, do you rest your hopes of security, when, building on the faith and veracity of public report, you have the temerity to sit in judgment on your neighbour? His guilt must, in some degree, be considered as doubtful, as long as it is not absolutely clear to you that he is really culpable: consequently your report concerning him, if it goes in the least to the detriment of his general character, and has not the sanction of clear and undeniable evidence, is an act of crying injustice against him.

But, supposing that you had witnessed his crime, and that the fact were purely as you had reported it, you

would not, even then, be entirely exculpated. For ought you know, your neighbour has entered into himself, and washed away all his stains by the tears of repentance. Grace is not always slow in its operations: it sometimes obtains the victory over a corrupted heart in an instant: a public fall is frequently the cause of a perfect conversion. Now, if this be the case; if your brother be repentant and reformed, (and you cannot be certain that he is not) is it not unjust,—is it not cruel to revive the remembrance of that which penance has effaced, and which the Lord hath forgotten? You have read the history of Magdalen: her crimes were public: the whole city was in a manner privy to them: and yet, at the very time that the pharisee turned away from her with disgust and abhorrence, she was purified in the sight of God: her tears and her love had obtained the forgiveness of her

sins at the feet of Jesus: still there was no refuge for her, no compassion in the heart of a fellow creature.

Be upon your guard, therefore, my beloved brethren. Throw a covering over the failings of your neighbour, and deal by him as the Lord, in his tender mercy, is accustomed to deal by you. He will not reveal your sins until the great day arrive when the secrets of all hearts will be finally disclosed. Follow his example. Put a restraint upon your tongue: suffer no remarks on the failings of another to escape from your lips: whenever the trumpet of defamation is sounded in your presence, if you cannot instantly silence it, shew by your countenance at least your utter disbelief and abhorrence of the slanderous tale. Guard against the infection which is spread by the envenomed tongues of calumny. — You cannot be too careful in your precautions: for the sin of

hearkening to detraction with complacency is not inferior in guilt to the sin of detraction itself. If detraction met with no admirers, the kingdom of Jesus would soon be freed from this scandal.

2. But unfortunately the vice of detraction is a pleasing vice; and contributing as it does to enliven conversation, it cannot fail of being applauded: the man who is agreeable in company is always admired and courted. This is the taste of the world: and it is not surprising, when we reflect that Christian charity is a virtue with which the world is totally unacquainted. But that the same love of detraction should be found in the assembly of the faithful, that piety itself should be brought in to sanction it, is almost beyond the powers of conception. Yet, incredible as it is, it is a fact, that many who pretend to a virtuous life are equally guilty of this

scandalous behaviour, and justify themselves by the plea of piety: they suppose that they are actuated by zeal, that they shew forth their hatred of sin by condemning sinners, and that they give honour and glory to God by dishonouring and defaming those who offend him; as if piety, the essence and soul of which is charity, possessed the privilege of exempting its followers from the practice of that most indispensable virtue.

Now, my beloved friends; you, I mean, who are implicated in the above remark, let me entreat you to reflect a little on the rules which are prescribed to zeal by the unerring word of God. They may be reduced to four principal heads: 1st, True zeal is grieved at the sight of the innumerable scandals which dishonour the Church; but its grief is interior; it laments them before God; it is importunate in its supplications that he would be mindful of

his ancient mercies to sinners; that he would look down with pity on his deluded creatures; that he would establish his reign in all hearts; and that he would withdraw the dissolute and abandoned from the error of their ways. This is the truly pious method of bewailing the offences of your neighbour; converse frequently with God about them, but forget them in the company of men.

2d. Piety does not give you any authority or command over your neighbour: since, therefore, you are not responsible for his conduct, it is none of your concern whether he stand or fall, but the Lord's: the Church has her pastors to watch over the flock, and from them an account will be required.

3d. The zeal which is according to knowledge, seeks the salvation, and not the humiliation of a Christian brother: it seeks to edify by example,

and not to injure by words; it appears in the most engaging forms, in order to win the affections of all, and promote their salvation; it is more grieved at the sight of the wretched state of the sinner, than incensed and scandalized at the view of his failings; and so far from publishing them to others, it would gladly conceal them even from its own eyes.

4th. The censorious zeal, which is exerted against an offending brother, is productive of no good effect, because the party concerned is not present: on the contrary, it is productive of the worst effects; it is calculated only to irritate his mind, and impede his conversion, were he by any means to become acquainted with your officious and clandestine interference: it is injurious to his reputation; it is disgraceful to piety; it is a rock of scandal to your hearers, and frequently induces them to fall into the same crime.

True zeal is humble, and fixes its eyes attentively on its own failings alone: true zeal is simple, more inclined to think good than evil:—true zeal is merciful, indulgent to the weaknesses of others, but severe to its own:—true zeal is timorous and reserved, and would rather suffer vice to pass uncensured, than expose itself to the danger of censuring the sinner unjustly.

These, my beloved, are the properties of true zeal. Be attentive to them, adopt them as your general rule of conduct. For why should the tongue, which has confessed Jesus Christ, which has renounced the pomps and vanities of the world, which sings forth the praises of the God of peace at the foot of his altar, and which is frequently consecrated by the participation of the most holy mysteries, continue to be a restless and dangerous evil, discharging the gall of bitterness against its fellow members? Is it not

unworthy of the religion you profess, to unite your voices together in the assembly of the faithful, and conjointly to offer up the sacrifice of peace and love, and then to hurl the shafts of defamation against those very persons whose union with you is so sacred, so indissoluble?

Let it be your constant endeavour to be prudent and temperate in your conversation, and to give no occasion to the dissolute to blaspheme against the religion you profess. Reprove your brethren for their faults, but let it be by the sanctity of your lives, and not by the asperity of your censures;—let it be by the odour of good example, and not by the scandal of defamation. Virtue is rendered amiable and respectable by mildness rather than by severity: the affections of sinners are gained by compassionating their weaknesses, rather than by publishing them. Be guided on all occasions by the

dictates of charity: veil over and excuse their faults, and you will the more easily induce them to confess their guilt, and condemn themselves. Thus you will gain over your brethren; you will do honour to true piety; you will contribute to banish from society the odious,—the widely extended vice of detraction; and, after having shewn mercy to your fellow members on earth, you will present yourselves with greater confidence before the Father of Mercies and God of all consolation, to request the same blessing for yourselves.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

See, therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, for the days are evil. . . Eph. v. 15, 16.

THE source of every disorder that prevails among the children of men, is the improper use of time. Some linger out their lives in indolence and sloth, unprofitable both to the state, to their neighbours, and to themselves: others busy themselves about their temporal affairs, and about

them only, without any other consideration. The first live as if they were placed upon earth for no other purpose than to shun labour and fatigue, and to endeavour by the variety of pleasures to escape that melancholy and irksomeness which are pursuing them on every side: the others seem to have no other business in life, than to labour for perishable things, and by means of the solicitudes and cares which they voluntarily create, to banish from their minds every reflection on the state of their interior. It seems as if time were a common enemy, and it were the wish and interest of all to get rid of it as quick as possible. Happy is the man, in the judgment of the world, who can so employ himself as not to perceive the length of time, and whose days seem to pass away so very rapidly, as scarcely to afford a few moments leisure for the slightest reflection on the manner in which they are spent.

In this manner is time, that most valuable gift of the Almighty, considered as a burthen. We dread the approach of that moment, after which time will be no more: and we dread in an almost equal degree the irksomeness which is occasioned by the duration of the present moment.

But, my beloved, let us reflect that time is given us for the purchase of eternity. The period of our existence on earth is short; let us therefore employ the whole of it in securing our salvation, for this is the will and intention of the giver. Let us learn the value of time, and we shall not squander it away: let us learn the proper use of time, and we shall devote it to the purposes for which it was given. Thus we shall avoid the perils which attend a life of indolence and ease; and we shall not be averted from attending to the one thing necessary by the solicitudes and fatigues of business and labour.

Be attentive to the considerations which I shall suggest on this important subject.

1. Time is of the utmost value and importance to us on three separate accounts. First, it is the price of eternity. Secondly, it is short, and we cannot be too early in taking advantage of it. Thirdly, it is irrecoverable: what is once lost, is lost for ever.

By the sin of our first parents, we were all condemned to death, and according to the strict rules of infinite justice, the sacrifice of our lives might have been required of us the very instant we received our existence. The blood of Jesus alone has erased the sentence of immediate death: we are suffered to live, because our Redeemer has died for us. Our days and moments are the first blessings which flow to us from the cross. The time, which we so foolishly squander away,

is the price of his blood, the fruit of his death, and the reward of his sacrifice.

Moreover, by every sin that we commit we insure a fresh sentence of death: every time that we violate the law of the Author of Life, we are deserving of death. As often, therefore, as the mercies of God have suspended the execution of the sentence after the commission of a crime, so often has he given us as it were a new life, that he might afford us an opportunity of making reparation for our past criminal abuse of time.

The life, therefore, which we enjoy after sin, is, in a spiritual light, a continued miracle of mercy and love. Every instant that we are suffered to breathe, is a new blessing which we receive from the God of Justice. Now, to spend this time and these moments in trifles and in indolence, is offering an insult to the infinite goodness of

our Benefactor; it is prodigally wasting an inestimable gift, to which we had no title; and it is exposing ourselves to the greatest danger of losing the price of eternity. This, my beloved, is the first crime which is incurred by the abuse of time.

We should accuse the man of an unpardonable act of folly, who, instead of raising himself to eminence and honour, by means of the immense treasures which he inherited, should suffer himself, through indolence and want of care, to be stripped and plundered of all, without enjoying the least benefit from the temporary possession of it.——Time, my beloved, is an invaluable treasure, which has been bequeathed to us by our Lord, and into the possession of which we entered at our birth. We have it in our power now to make a proper use of it: we may purchase for ourselves all that is great and glorious: we may, by its

means, exalt ourselves far above the crowd of the children of Adam, far above kings and emperors: we may by its means raise ourselves up to the mansions of the blessed, where all are kings, and where the reign of each one will extend through all eternity.

Is it not, therefore, an unpardonable act of folly, to squander away in idle gratifications that inestimable treasure with which the most valuable of all possessions might be purchased? There is not a day, there is not an hour, nor a moment in which we may not merit an increase of happiness for eternity: is it not, therefore, an incalculable loss, to lose any part of it? is it not an inconceivable thing, that time should hang heavy on our hands, and that it should be a burden and a torment to us?

Time, moreover, is short, and we cannot be too early in taking advantage of it. Were the years of our existence on earth to be lengthened out

like those of the ancient patriarchs (and even then the period would not be too long to be employed in purchasing eternal happiness,) we might, by superior diligence, make up for any portion of time that we had ill spent. But, alas! the life of man is included within such contracted limits, that not a moment is to be lost. The time of our sojourning here, comparatively speaking, is no more than a single instant: like the meteors, which on a clear night are seen to glide across the firmament, we appear for a moment, and immediately vanish out of sight. We are here to-day, and are gone to-morrow. And how shall we find any time to squander away in a life that is so quickly spent? Reckon up the time that is necessarily spent in sleep, in providing for the necessities of the body, in the duties of our state in society, and what is there remaining for ourselves, for God, and for eterni-

ty? Is not that man a real object of pity, who is at a loss how to dispose of those few moments, and who has recourse to so many artifices to kill that time, which is so valuable, and so short?

Besides, my Christian brethren, consider what numberless crimes you have to expiate during this short space. Were your lives protracted to ten times their usual length, you would not have sufficient time to atone for one half of them; you would even then be obliged to throw yourselves at the feet of God, and beg that the many deficiencies that would remain might be filled up by his infinite mercies. And is time to be found for vanity and pleasure in a life in which so much is to be done? Ought any part of that period to be trifled away in dissipation and folly, the whole of which is not sufficient to satisfy for one single crime?

Ah! let us reflect seriously before it

is too late. A criminal condemned to death, and who has but the respite of one day wherein to solicit and obtain his pardon, would not have much time to lose: he would not complain of the length of the day; he would not squander away in idle amusements the moments which were granted him for the purpose of soliciting and procuring his discharge. No: his whole attention, his whole soul would be taken up in the important business: he would endeavour by every means in his power to make up for the shortness of the time; and he would consider every moment as a thing of inestimable value. Senseless as we are! we ourselves are condemned: the sentence is past: we have only one day allotted us (for life is but a day) wherein to avert the greatest of all misfortunes, and to obtain a discharge. And shall we spend this short, this fleeting day, in an indolent manner, in vain and childish

pastimes? Shall we have recourse to expedients to fill up the vacant hours? Shall we calmly and contentedly behold the approach of evening, after having made no other use of the day, than in heaping up a fresh treasure of wrath, and in rendering ourselves more deserving of the sentence which we have incurred?

Ah! we know not but that the abuse of all this time will induce the Lord to abridge the term of our existence, and to call us away in the midst of our days. An unforeseen accident may befal us in an instant, and bereave us of life. How many sudden and alarming deaths do we hear of;—deaths, which are generally permitted to happen in punishment of the abuse of time! How many are surprised by the fatal stroke, without time for repentance, with all their sins on their heads; and hurried before the awful tribunal of a just God, before they

have commenced the great work of repentance!

Never, therefore, let it be said of us, that we are at a loss how to employ our time. How many holy solitaries have there been, who, without any other business on their hands than that of salvation, complained that the day was too short; who devoted even the silent time of night to the same pious exercises in which they spent the day; and after all, lamented that the morning sun broke in upon them too soon, and interrupted their sweet canticles of praise and love. Even in the calm and leisure of retirement, these truly pious Christians had not too much time to employ in publishing and extolling the eternal mercies of their God: and shall we, whose duties and whose cares are so numerous; shall we, who live in the midst of the busy scenes of the world; shall we, who owe so much to relations, to children, to friends, to

inferiors, to masters, to our country; shall we complain that the short space of time that is left at our disposal is too long to be employed in blessing and praising the holy name of our Creator?

Let it not, however, be understood that every kind of relaxation and amusement is forbidden. Nature requires that some time should be allotted to them, and religion only forbids that they should be indulged in to the prejudice of more essential duties, and particularly of the duty which we owe to God and to our own souls. Ah! when we are stretched on the bed of death, we shall know the value of time: we shall be convinced of the impropriety and injustice of having alienated from his direct and immediate service one single moment beyond what the calls of nature or our temporal duties required.

The inconsistency of our conduct appears in a stronger light, when we

reflect that time lost is irrecoverable, and that, when it is once gone, it is gone for ever.

The loss of honours, riches, or pleasures, is not of such consequence, because they may be regained on some future occasion: but the loss of time is the loss of so many means of salvation, which will never be offered to us again. Considering the short period of our existence on earth, we have every reason to believe that every hour and every instant is given to us for some particular purpose; that God has marked out the use to which each of them ought to be devoted; that he has allotted special graces for each; and that he has appointed that each should contribute to the great work of our sanctification. By suffering these hours, therefore, to escape without being devoted to their proper use, we deprive ourselves of the graces which were attached to them, and conse-

quently lose so many necessary helps for salvation.

The loss of time, moreover, is an irreparable loss. We ought, every day and every hour, to advance a step nearer heaven. If we neglect to do this, if we misemploy these days and hours, we are so far behind in our journey; and when the end of our time approaches, we shall discover that we are so far distant from the goal. And how will it be possible for us, during that short period which will then remain of life, to make up for past indolence? Shall we be able to redouble our pace, and perform as much in one day as ought to have been performed during that long space of time which we spent in doing nothing to the purpose?—And as to the works of satisfaction and penance, which ought to have been performed when we were in the strength and vigour of health, but which were neglected, how shall we

be able to perform them all when our strength is gone, and the last hour of our existence is approaching? Ah! it will be in vain then to say that God does not require impossibilities: it is we that have placed ourselves in this state: the number of our faults will not lessen our duties: sin must be punished before it is entirely effaced. God gave us sufficient time and strength for this purpose: if we have abused this blessing; if we have spent the time in accumulating fresh debts, and devoted our strength to other purposes than to promoting the honour and glory of our Maker; it remains that God himself should execute what we have refused to do, and inflict due punishment on us in the next world for the crimes which we have neglected to expiate in this.

2. To all that I have hitherto said on the misemployment of time, it is very probable that the greater number

of my hearers have replied, in private to themselves, that their days are spent far otherwise than in indolence and sloth; that their occupations and duties are so numerous and urgent, as to absorb their whole time, and seldom to leave one hour at their disposal.

But, my brethren, the Christian use of time does not consist merely in the whole of it being employed; it consists in employing it in a proper manner, and according to the will of him who gave it to you. In the first place, you must confine yourselves to the duties of your state of life, and exclude all those unnecessary cares and labours which tend only to the gratification of the passions. It not unfrequently happens that men engage in a multiplicity of occupations for no other purpose than to fill up their time, in order to avoid the gloom and uneasiness which they would experience were they left to their own thoughts. Self-examina-

tion is an employment which they cannot endure: they are afraid to look into the state of their souls: they know that all is not right there, and therefore, to avoid the melancholy which would be diffused over their minds were they free from employment, they create a variety of occupations, in hopes of being able to live in an entire forgetfulness of themselves. This, certainly, is not a Christian use of time.—Others are engaged in a variety of occupations, which are nothing at all to their purpose. Others, in occupations that have no other object than the gratification of pride, vanity, sensuality, curiosity, ambition, or interest. These they attend to, without consulting in any manner the will of God, or any kind of reference to his honour and glory: they even attach such importance to them, as to be ready to neglect the concerns of God and of their own

souls, rather than be deprived of the advantage or pleasure which may accrue from these trifling or criminal pursuits. This, too, it must be very evident, cannot be considered as a Christian use of time.

We are enjoined by the gospel, in the most precise terms, to refer all, whatsoever we do, to the honour and glory of God. Our whole time must be devoted to him. Every action, every pursuit, every labour and fatigue; every thing, in short, that engages our attention, or employs our time, must contribute to the great work of our sanctification, or it will be rejected by him as unprofitable: our days will not be full days in his estimation, unless they are full of those works that will merit the good things of eternity. Every thing that we do, merely with a view to temporal advantages, however high it may exalt us in the esteem of men, will be

totally disregarded by him, as unworthy of his notice.

How different, my beloved, are the judgments of God, in this respect, from those of the world! In the opinion of the world, that man has gone through life honourably and usefully, who has brought up his family with credit and order, who has honestly encreased the patrimony of his forefathers, and who has been respected and esteemed by his fellow creatures. But in the estimation of God, such a man is not entitled to an eternal recompense, nor to any merit in his sight, if the principal motive of his actions through life was to promote his own glory instead of the glory of his Maker; to possess temporal advantages and comforts, instead of heaping up to himself treasures in heaven; and to raise himself to eminence among his brethren, instead of walking in the humble steps of his crucified Jesus. It

will be in vain for him to pretend to vindicate himself on the day of final retribution, by stating that his whole life was a life of labour and fatigue. "True," it will be said, "you did la-"bour incessantly, but you did not la-"bour to save your soul." It will be in vain to state that he provided handsomely for his children, and that he encreased the fortune left him by his progenitors: the Great Judge will reply: "You bequeathed temporal "goods to your family; but you did "not bequeath to them the fear of the "Lord, by instilling into their minds "the principles of religion and piety." It will be in vain to state that he applied himself with unwearied diligence to the duties of his calling, that he had many friends, and that he was obliging and civil to all: the Great Judge will reply: "You did, indeed, make "to yourself friends on earth, but you "did not make to yourself friends in

"heaven: you laboured to acquire "the esteem of men, but you were not "solicitous to make yourself pleasing "and acceptable to God. Nothing "will avail you now, but those works "which you performed with the view "of promoting your salvation."

What an immense void, my beloved, will be discovered in our lives, how much time will be declared to have been mispent and lost, when the great Searcher of Hearts shall come to judge justice!—Let us meditate frequently on these awful truths: time is short, it is irrecoverable; eternal happiness is to be purchased with it; it was given to us for that and no other purpose. Let us calculate from this statement, how much of it ought to be devoted to the world, to pleasures, and to the great work of salvation. Time is short, saith the apostle; let us, therefore, use this world as if we used it not; let us rejoice as if we rejoiced not; let us

consider all that is transitory as no better than a shadow that passeth away; and let us consider that part of our lives only as profitably spent, which has been made to contribute to the great work of our sanctification.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON FORGIVING INJURIES.

So shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.

Matt. xviii. 35.

THE virtue, which is enforced by the parable read in the gospel of this Sunday, forms one of the most distinguishing features of the true Christian. To forgive an injury,—to love an enemy, are acts of the most heroic fortitude; and have been always admired and extolled by the wise and good of every age and nation. The

pagan philosophers were not unacquainted with the excellency of this virtue. They recommended it to their followers, and practised it themselves. Their motives, indeed, were not of the purest kind; but they admired the virtue, and although their inducement was pride or vanity, or their contempt for the ignoble passion of hatred and revenge, still they judged it necessary for the formation of the perfect man.

The motives upon which the Christian is enjoined to love his enemies, encrease the lustre and excellency of this virtue. He is to forgive injuries in obedience to the will of his Great Creator: he is to love all mankind because they are his brethren in Jesus Christ: he is to pardon all things in hopes of experiencing at the tribunal of his Judge the same mercy for himself. His charity is not to be circumscribed by time, place, or persons:

it is to be universal and without exception.

But notwithstanding the excellence of this virtue, it is practised by very few even of those who call themselves Christians; and the neglect of it is considered as justifiable. To this subject, therefore, I will call your attention, and will endeavour to shew that the precept of Christian charity is equitable and just, from the very pretexts which are usually alledged to justify the violation of it.

1. Were we to examine into the origin of the friendships and connections which subsist among individuals of the human race, we should find that they are constantly engendered and supported either by a similarity in their habits and dispositions, or else by interest or vanity. And on the other hand, that the dislikes, the hatreds and animosities which are too often witnessed among us, are occa-

sioned by the absence of one or other of these primary causes; that religion is seldom consulted on the business; and that friendships are formed and dissolved without any reference whatever to the duties of Christian charity.

But such an examination would be unnecessary. The pretexts which are usually alledged by the violators of the law of love in justification of their conduct, fully prove the truth of my position. On these, therefore, I will build my arguments. Be attentive, for the subject is important.

It is commonly said in the world, and I will suppose that it is you who say it, "that such a person is disagreeable in his manners; that his conversation and his behaviour are disgusting to you; that you feel an antipathy to him, which you cannot account for; that to see or speak to such a person would only encrease the natural aversion which is so deeply rooted in your mind; that na-

ture has its likes and dislikes, and that, since they are not dependent on your will, you are not responsible for them."

To the world, perhaps, this reasoning may appear conclusive; but let us examine it in a religious point of view. Is not this person, whose manners and deportment are disgusting to you, a child of God, — a brother of Jesus Christ, — and an heir of heaven? His manners and appearance, whatever they may be, have not effaced one of those sacred marks which he received in baptism: he is still united to you with the same heavenly and sacred bands which then united you together; and these bands ought to make him appear respectable in your eyes. The precept of brotherly love is not to be fulfilled without pain and labour. Indeed what necessity would there have been of any command at all on the subject, if nothing more were required

of you than to love those whom nature and inclination prompted you to love? Such a command would have been nugatory: for nature itself induces you to love them. The existence of the precept, therefore, implies a real difficulty in the performance of it; and this difficulty is the overcoming the repugances and antipathies which nature sometimes feels against certain individuals. Our Lord foresaw the difficulty, and on account of it has affixed the greatest merit to the observance of this one point; and has declared that he that loves has fulfilled the whole law. Aversions, therefore, instead of justifying the violation of the precept, determine the obligation of its observance, and apply the duty personally to yourselves.

Moreover, the Christian is obliged to regulate his conduct, not according to the caprices of humour and fancy, but according to the principles of reason

and religion. The gospel enjoins you to deny yourselves, and resist the inclinations of corrupt nature; and can it be supposed that these inclinations will authorize the infringement of its ordinances? Were repugnance to any particular duty sufficient to remove the obligation of fulfilling it, there is not a single point of the law that would be obligatory: you would be exempt from every duty, and the greater your repugnance happened to be, the more you would be justified, and the more conspicuous your innocence would be. But, my beloved, the law is not made to depend on the likes and dislikes of men: it is intended to repress the inclinations of nature; not to cherish and support them. Even the world, corrupt as it is, despises and ridicules the man who is guided in his actions and opinions, in his hatred and love, by the rules of a fantastical caprice; and is the gospel to be more indulgent on this head?

—the gospel, which enforces the perpetual renunciation of self-will, and the uninterrupted mortification of our vices and concupiscences?

No: my beloved, your aversions are not to be justified by such pleas as these. But let us take things in another point of view. You say that "such or such a person is disagreeable in his manners, and that you cannot endure him." I allow it: but do you suppose that there is nothing offensive in your conduct, and that you are entitled to the love and esteem of all around you? You will not say it. Now, if in your opinion it be reasonable and just, that others should excuse your peculiarities, and should consider only the rectitude of your intentions, and the other good qualities on which you pride yourselves; that they should not take offence at trifles, at unintentional improprieties, which it is impossible always to be guarded against; is it not

just that you should follow the same rule of equity with respect to them; that you should bear with their imperfections in the same manner as you require that they should bear with yours; and that you should not by your own aversions give them cause to entertain a reciprocal aversion for you?

Were we, however, to examine into the cause, we should perhaps discover that your dislikes originated rather in the peculiarity and inconsistency of your own temper, than in any real defects in the character of your neighbour. This may be ascertained by enquiring whether the same opinion is entertained of him by others; I mean by his relatives, and those who are more intimately acquainted with him.——Perhaps, likewise, it might be discovered that your dislikes originated in envy. Envy is a subtle vice, and seldom presents itself before your eyes in full view; it is composed of the

very dregs of meanness, and therefore conceals itself from inspection. But this may be ascertained by looking into your own hearts, and examining whether the objects of your aversion were not formerly in an inferior station, or upon a level with yourselves, and have risen by degrees to a state of eminence superior to that which you have been enabled to attain.

Perhaps, however, you will say, that, let the cause be what it will, the weakness of your nature is as you have described it, and that there is no accounting for humours and dispositions. This may be true to a certain degree; but there is a love, which takes its rise in reason and religion, which ought to gain the ascendency over nature. The gospel does not require that you love the *manners* or the *persons* of your neighbours; but it requires that you love *them;* or in other words, that you respect them as bre-

thren of Jesus Christ, that you bear up with them, that you excuse their weaknesses, that you throw a veil over their defects, that you be kind and compassionate to them, and finally, that you behave to them in every respect as you require them to behave to you. This is true charity; this is the charity that will continue for ever.

2. But let us proceed to the second pretext by which you attempt to justify your hatreds and dislikes. You say, that "such or such a person has exerted his utmost endeavours to ruin you; that his daily study is how to involve you in fresh difficulties; that he delights in your sufferings and grievances; and that you have no doubt but he would reduce you, if it were in his power, to the most abject state of poverty and want: and how is it possible to entertain any affection or regard for such a determined enemy?"

Well, Christian brethren, supposing

that this is the truth, and nothing but the truth, can you see any reason why you should increase the evil? Hatred is much more serious in its consequences, than all the malevolence of your enemies. The effects of the one are only transient; those of the other, eternal. The one can only deprive you of the perishable things of this world; the other will deprive you of an immortal crown. By entertaining sentiments of hatred, therefore, you only increase your evils; you exercise revenge on yourselves, and incur a guilt which will expose you to the danger of being lost for ever.

Besides, what advantage will you reap from hatred, if the person you complain of has entirely ruined you? Will it restore to you all that you have lost? Will it improve your condition? You say, that under the pressure of calamity, it is an easement to the mind to upbraid and chastise the

author of your distresses. But, my beloved, what kind of easement is this? Hatred is a restless and tormenting passion; and is it from hatred that consolation is to be derived? Revenge is unmanly; revenge will perpetuate your sufferings, and make them eternal; and is it from this source that you look for comfort and ease? Oh! be not deceived by such illusory ideas. You are Christians; adopt therefore the sentiments of Christians, and regulate your conduct accordingly. Religion informs you that these trials are intended to promote your true interests; and that they are sent by an all-wise and an all-merciful Providence. Perhaps, if you had been suffered to enjoy an uninterrupted tide of prosperity, you would have neglected the service of God; perhaps, if your inclinations had not been thwarted, and your patience exposed to trial, your desires would have been increased

beyond bounds, your unrestrained corruption would have led you into excesses, and crimes, and scandals, in the midst of which, perhaps, you would have been surprised by death. If, therefore, God humble you on earth, in order to exalt you in heaven; if, with a view to withdraw you from the brink of a precipice on which you were heedlessly playing, he permit one neighbour to injure you in your property, another to supplant you in your schemes of ambition, and another to contradict you in your inclinations and desires, have you any cause to complain? Ah! you ought rather to adore the inscrutable designs of God, and to bless his mercies for ever. You ought to look upon your offending brethren with the eyes of compassion and love, and consider them as the instruments employed by the hand of God for promoting your eternal welfare. Instead of hating them, you ought to

supplicate the Father of mercies, that the grace of repentance may be given to them; and that none of those may perish who are suffered to contribute to your salvation.

Hatred never exists in the mind that is duly impressed with the sentiments of religion. Were you sincerely convinced that all that passes with time, is no better than smoke which is scattered by the wind; that salvation is your great, your only concern; and that the only treasures worthy of your ambition are the riches of eternity, into which you will quickly be constrained to enter, you would look down with compassion and astonishment on those unthinking mortals who wrangle, who dispute, who offend their God, who endanger their salvation on account of their worldly interest: you would compare them to children, whose anger and rage are excited by the loss of mere baubles, and

whose animosity and hatred are occasioned by trifles which would raise a smile on the countenance of the man whose reason had attained to a state of maturity. Yes, my beloved, infants can witness, without dismay, and without sorrow, the loss of their inheritance, and the ruin of their families; but the loss of their infantile toys is more than they can endure: their indignation is instantly roused by an invasion on this species of property; and their tranquillity is not regained until the objects of their fond attachment be restored to them. It is the same with men: they can witness the loss of their heavenly inheritance without emotion; they can forfeit their right to the eternal possessions which Jesus has purchased for them, without regret; they can suffer the kingdom of God and the treasures of immortality to slip out

of their hands, without attempting to prevent it: but no sooner is an attack made on their temporal property, no sooner are they deprived of their toys and play-things, (for temporal things deserve no better name, when compared with the things of eternity) than their indignation is roused, than an attack is made on the daring invader of their rights, and violence and rage, and hatred and revenge, are instantly set at work to regain the possession of them. Oh! my friends, such inconsistent conduct is unworthy of the man and of the Christian.

3. But, perhaps, you will say, "that your neighbour has deprived you, or endeavoured to deprive you of something that is more valuable than temporal possessions: that he has spoken against you in public and private; that he has added calumny to detraction,

and laid crimes to your charge which you never committed: that he is inveterate in his malice, and that he employs every means to make you appear odious and contemptible in the eyes of your friends." These undoubtedly are injuries of the most serious kind. But before I prove that they are insufficient motives for hatred and animosity, let me caution you against giving full credit to the reports which you have heard. The tale, perhaps, when related by your supposed adversary, was devoid of malice, and incapable of injuring your reputation; and owes its present malignity to the tongues of men who have embellished and exaggerated it on purpose to spread dissension, and widen the breach between you. Such a thing is not uncommon.

Allowing, however, that the calumny in all its malignity originated with your neighbour, perhaps it may

be found on examination that you were in part the cause of it: that you had calumniated him, published his faults and imperfections, and irritated him to retort upon you the shafts of defamation and scandal. If so, you have very little reason to complain, and much less to give way to animosity and hatred.—But we will suppose that nothing of all this can be laid to your charge; and on this supposition I will ask, whether you will receive any advantage from the vice of hatred? Will it re-establish your reputation? will it refute the calumny? Will it not rather draw down upon you evils of a far more pernicious tendency, and expose you to the danger of being for ever miserable? Were you desirous of regaining your lost honour, the only proper means to be adopted would be, to shew forth the improbability of the reports by the purity and regularity of your moral conduct. Piety and silence

would soon triumph over the malice of your enemy; would soon convince the world of your innocence, and overwhelm your calumniator with shame and confusion. But to return evil for evil, to return hatred for detraction, is the revenge only of the weak, the wretched consolation of the guilty, and the resource of those only who cannot seek protection in holiness and virtue.

But let us come nearer to the point: let us open the book of the gospels, and examine into the doctrine of Truth itself on this subject. There it is that you are commanded to love those who persecute and calumniate you; to pray for those who hate you; to supplicate the Father of Mercies in behalf of your most inveterate enemies, and to entreat that he would change their hearts, that he would instil into their minds sentiments of peace and charity, and that he would adopt them into the number of his elect. There it is that

you are exhorted to mutual charity and forgiveness, by the consideration that you are all brethren of the same Father; that you have all the same hope of your calling; that you were all created for the purpose of being united together in the bosom of the Divinity, and of celebrating in one universal concert his praises and mercies for ever. There it is that you learn that injuries are real blessings, that they are due to you on account of the many sins which you have committed; and that the patient endurance of them will entitle you to the possession of the kingdom of heaven, which is promised to those who suffer persecution for justice sake.

Self-love alone will induce you to love those who love you, who flatter you, and who sound forth your praises before others. But this, according to the words of our Saviour, is no more than what the heathens do. The gospel requires more; it requires that

you love those who hate and calumniate you: it declares, that on this condition alone the mercies of God will be extended to you; and that forgiveness is only to be hoped for from him, in proportion as you forgive one another.

In fact, my beloved, with what appearance of reason can you expect that God will forget the sinful abominations of your past life; and that he will neglect the interests of his own honour and glory, which you have so frequently and so grievously injured; if you, at the same time, assume the air of unrelenting justice before your brethren, and exact the last farthing of every debt which they have contracted with you? You probably enjoy a reputation to which you are not entitled: you probably would be disgraced for ever in the opinion of men, were the true state of your souls open to their inspection: and

is it reasonable to expect forgiveness of the unmerited insults which you have offered to the Lord of Glory, at the time that you refuse on your part to pardon the trivial, the merited injuries which you have received from your fellow creatures?

No: my beloved, do not flatter yourselves with the expectation of any such blessings. You are indebted to the Lord the immense sum of ten thousand talents; and the only means of obtaining the discharge of this debt, is to remit the hundred pence which is owing to you: or, in other words, the innumerable offences which you have committed against God will never be forgiven, unless you love your enemies, unless you forgive all injuries and affronts, and unless you are in peace and charity with all the world. This is the great precept of fraternal love: be

faithful in the observance of it, and then you may reasonably hope for that mercy from God, which is promised to the merciful.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON FALSE RECONCILIATIONS.

Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.

Matt. xxii. 21.

WERE I to enter into an investigation of all the duties which are enjoined by our Saviour in the words of my text, I should have to investigate all the duties, moral, civil, and religious, which the Christian at any time is bound to perform: for in these few words they are all contained:

render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. But instead of entering into a long enumeration of duties, which would be neither instructive nor entertaining, I will call your attention to one of the principal duties of a Christian, and from the words of my text will prove the necessity of complying with it; I mean the forgiveness of injuries, the same that occupied your attention last Sunday. I have already exposed the futility of the pretexts by which so many endeavour to justify the violation of this precept: I will now state the nature and the extent of the obligation, and caution you against those false reconciliations which we too frequently witness, and by which many are deceived to their eternal ruin.

1. There is not one point of the Christian law that is expressed in plainer terms than the precept of loving our

neighbour; and yet there is not one that is more abused, less understood, or more violently wrested from its natural meaning, than this same precept. In fact, it is usual for almost every one to say, that he has forgiven his brother from his heart, and that he has nothing to reproach himself with on that head; and yet a sincere and perfect reconciliation is one of those extraordinary events which are seldom witnessed. This may be proved by examining the motives on which reconciliations are founded, the means by which they are effected, and the subsequent deportment of the parties with respect to each other.

First, As to the motives on which they are founded. To form a perfect and sincere reconciliation it is necessary that the parties should be actuated by charity, and that they should entertain a Christian respect and love for each other. Now, if we examine the

motives on which reconciliations are generally founded, we shall discover that Christian charity never enters into the account, and that the motives are mere human motives, referring solely to our satisfaction and interest in this life. Sometimes discordant brethren are induced to consent to a reconciliation at the request of friends; at other times, in order to avoid consequences of a disagreeable nature which would result from open hostility; and at other times again, that they may not be secluded from certain assemblies which are frequented by both parties, and which would be rendered uncomfortable by the presence of men who are declared enemies to each other. Sometimes a reconciliation is effected with a view to acquire the reputation of being men of principle and moderation; and at other times, to silence the adverse parties, whose former intimacy, and whose perfect acqu aintance

with each others character and plans, render it dangerous to provoke mutual resentment.

These are the ordinary motives on which reconciliations are founded: and that these motives have no connection with true charity is obvious. Indeed how is it possible that men, whose piety is superficial, and who have not sufficient resolution to submit to the most trifling self-denials of the gospel, should be capable of performing this the most sublime, and the most difficult point in the whole code of Christian morality? No: were we admitted into the secret recesses of their souls, we should see that their reconciliation is purely external; that they still retain a sense of the injuries they have sustained; that their hearts are not changed; and that they are as much estranged from the sentiments of true love and charity as they were before.

2. Let us now look into the means

by which these reconciliations are effected. In general the parties themselves do not proceed alone in the business; the interference, not of charity, for the voice of charity is not listened to, but the interference of friends is necessary. This interference is attended with the greatest difficulties. The wisest precautions are to be adopted: the nicest discriminations are to be made: interests are to be reconciled, obstacles to be removed, and formalities to be observed. Now, are these the workings of charity? Would mediators be required if hatred were entirely banished from the breast, and Christian love existed between the parties? Conditions likewise are exacted: the aggressor must make his advances, must express sorrow for the past, and must meet his adversary at least half way. Now charity is a stranger to all these niceties: it has only one rule, and that is,

to forget the injury, and to love the offending party with a fraternal love.

Sometimes, I will allow, it may be proper to proceed with cautious prudence; because it is not impossible that a precipitate or ill-timed attempt to be reconciled may fail of success. But these measures must be suggested by charity, and not by vanity; and, therefore, I again repeat, that those reconciliations which are brought about with so much difficulty, and are attended with so many restrictions and conditions, are not to be depended on; and that there is too much reason to believe that the crime of hatred still subsists, although the scandal of avowed enmity is done away. Our Lord says: *Go, and be reconciled to thy brother*, (Matt. v. 24). He does not say: be not too forward in your advances, lest your adversary take advantage of it: do not solicit a reconciliation too earnestly, lest it be con-

sidered as a tacit avowal of the justice of his cause, and a condemnation of your own: but he simply says: *Go, and be reconciled to thy brother.* It is his will that charity alone should effect the reconciliation: he supposes that mediators are not required as an inducement to love your brethren.

3. Examine yourselves, my brethren, on these subjects. You have probably been at variance with some one or other of your fellow-creatures: see whether your reconciliation has been effected by charity or not: it is worth the trouble of enquiry. Perhaps the truth would be more readily investigated, were you to examine into the mode of conduct which you have followed in respect to your neighbour subsequently to your reconciliation. What then has this been? Did you, after you said that you forgave him from your heart, did you form the resolution to avoid his company, and

to have no further communication with him? and have you adherred to this resolution? If this has been your conduct, it is in vain that you attempt to delude yourselves with the supposition that you have fulfilled the precept of charity, and that you have done all that a good Christian is bound to do. Your reconciliation is imperfect: you have not forgiven your brother; and you yet remain in the state of hatred, of sin, and of death.

For, my Christian friends, is it possible to entertain an aversion for a person whom you really love? If you have embraced your enemy as your brother in Jesus Christ, is it possible that the very sight of him can be offensive to you? Perhaps you will say; that your refusal to see him is nothing more than a measure of prudence: that you will probably not be able to contain yourself within the bounds of moderation in his presence; and that,

consequently, to break off entirely is the only means of avoiding disagreements in future. But what kind of forgiveness is this? Do you think that if you had been truly reconciled with him, his presence alone would have been sufficient to awaken your former resentment, and rekindle your passion? You perhaps have renounced the desires of revenge; and would not, on any account, injure or insult him: but this alone is not Christian forgiveness: the gospel enjoins you to love him, and to shew forth your love by treating him as a friend and a brother.

In fact, would you consent that God should love you on the same conditions of never seeing you? Would you say that his goodness and mercy had been extended to you according to your wishes, were he to exclude you for ever from his presence?—It is impossible, my beloved, to give a more unequivocal testimony of determined ha-

tred than this. When the passion is confined within more moderate bounds, it is frequently concealed in the heart, and no neglect of the external duties of society is suffered to take place. But when the presence of the offending party cannot be endured, the passion is extended beyond all bounds; and can you pretend to maintain that you are at peace with all men? You exhibit marks of the most inveterate ill-will; and can you pretend that you are guided only by the dictates of true Christian love?

Moreover, as Christians, we are all united together by the most sacred bands. We are members of the same body,—children of the same Father,—disciples of the same Master,—heirs of the same kingdom. We were regenerated in the same baptism,—bought with the same price. The religion we profess is a holy society, in which is a reciprocal communication of prayers,

of offerings, of merits, and of works. Every duty reminds us that our neighbours and ourselves constitute, as it were, one family, one body, one heart, and one soul. And can it be supposed that you love your neighbour, and that you are united to him in the bands of Christian union, at the time that you have broken the bands of society, and refuse to have any communication with him?

As Christians, likewise, we are united together by the bands of hope. We desire, and we pray, that we may all meet together in happiness hereafter, that we may rejoice in each others felicity, and that we may sing together in concert the praises of the Divinity in eternal love. And are you united with your neighbour in these bands of hope, at the time that you cannot endure his presence? No: my beloved, it is impossible. — Be not, therefore, deceived; for, depend upon

it, as long as you entertain this aversion to your neighbour, so long are you guilty of the crime of hatred, and so long do you close the fountain of God's mercies against yourselves.

Perhaps you will say, that, since the laws of charity are so particular in this point, you will offer violence to yourselves, and live upon the same terms of civility and decorum with your neighbour as you did formerly; but that he must never expect to regain the same place in your confidence and affections.

This is certainly advancing a step further; but this is not true charity: this is not loving your neighbour as yourselves. The charity which the gospel enjoins is centered in the heart: it is something more than a love which is manifested only exteriorly; it is a real and effective love, a sincere regard for the object beloved, ready to prove itself by works: it obliterates

the recollection of past injuries, and removes every symptom of animosity both from the mind and heart. This ought to be your charity; for this alone is Christian charity.

To observe the outward forms of civility towards an offending neighbour, and to be ready to come forward to his assistance in times of danger or want, is no more than what the world, and the laws of society require from you. But the law of God requires that you love him; and as long as your affections are alienated from him, the observance of all other laws will not avail you to salvation. You neglect the most essential point of Christian morality; and are followers of the gospel only in name.

If mankind were united together by no other bands than the external bands of society, then nothing more would be required of you than to perform the duties of society, and to keep up that

external intercourse of good offices, of politeness and civility among one another, on which the harmony and the existence of society depend. But there are other bands of a more sacred nature — the bands of faith, of hope, of charity, and of piety. With these we are united together, and form, as it were, a holy and internal society, totally distinct from the civil and external society which legislators have established. If, therefore, you do nothing more than maintain a social intercourse with your adversary, you indeed fulfil the duties of civil society, but you neglect those of religion: you do not disturb the peace of the world, but you overturn the order of charity; you are good subjects of the state, but you are not subjects of the heavenly Sion; you are men of this world, but you are not men of the world to come: you do all that is required of you by the state,

but you do nothing in the sight of God, because you are destitute of true charity. Do not, therefore, be led astray by the erroneous supposition that, if you refrain from exhibiting any external symptoms of hatred againts your neighbour, you fulfil the laws of the gospel: for, if the gospel required nothing more, its ordinances would be nugatory and vain; they would exact nothing real, nothing substantial, nothing that would affect the heart; and the grand precept of charity, which alone stamps a value on our actions, would be nothing more than a deceitful pretence, a mere act of hypocrisy.

But why all these arguments to prove that such reconciliations, as I have described, are imperfect? Interrogate your own hearts,—you, I mean, who either shun the society of an offending brother, or who confine your charity to mere external civilities,—interrogate

your own hearts, I say, and they will tell you that you do not love them, that you are not properly reconciled with them, and that, in fact, you entertain as great an aversion for them as ever. Interrogate your friends, your acquaintance, the world at large; and they will all tell you, that in their opinion, you are as much at variance with your neighbour in the dispositions of your hearts as you were before; and that your reconciliation extends no farther than to external ceremony.—This is the language of the world; this is the language of your own hearts; this is the language of the gospel, of charity, and of truth: and can you refuse assent to such testimonies as these?

Ah! seldom indeed is there a perfect reconciliation in heart and mind! Dissensions, it is true, are frequently terminated; but seldom is there a termination of ill-will and dislike:—

the parties, perhaps, may again associate together, but seldom is there a re-union of hearts:—they, perhaps, may mutually forgive the offence, but seldom do they cordially love the offender:—they, perhaps, may desist from treating each other as enemies; but seldom do they embrace each other as brethren, and as members of the same body.—Examples of such false reconciliations as these, are but too common in the lower as well as in the higher classes of society, in the walks of virtue as well as in the shades of vice.—But, I will again repeat, that unless you forgive your brother from your hearts, you never will obtain the forgiveness of your own offences from the Father of mercies; and never will be admitted into the number of his friends either here or hereafter. Although you may frequent the sacraments; although you may be attentive to the duties of humanity, and be exemplary

in every other respect, it will profit you nothing. Although you were to have the gift of prophecy; although you were to understand all mysteries and all knowledge; although you had faith sufficient to remove mountains; although you were to distribute your goods to the poor, and deliver your body to be burned, and did not at the same time possess charity, it would all profit you nothing, (1 *Cor.* xiii.).

"This, perhaps, you may say, is a hard saying; and who can bear it? Were I to attempt to extort the good will of all my adversaries, and insist on their friendship, I should be treated with contempt, and probably fail in the end: my nature, moreover, is such, that although I can forgive the injuries I receive, I cannot love the men who wantonly or maliciously inflict them." To the first I reply, that you are disciples of Jesus, and not of the world: that you are not to be in-

fluenced in your attempts to effect a reconciliation by any thing that the world will think or say; but that you are to adhere strictly to the injunction of our Lord: *go, and be reconciled to thy brother:* these are his words, and *his words shall not pass away.* If, indeed, your neighbour obstinately refuses to enter into an accommodation, then the fault is not imputable to you: if you forgive him from your hearts, and love him as yourselves, you fulfil the law, and save your own souls.——With respect to the second objection, I candidly acknowledge that it is a hard saying, and that it is contrary to the feelings of flesh and blood. But there are other precepts of the gospel, which are equally repugnant to nature, and are yet obligatory: to take up your cross, to deny yourselves, and to be humble of heart, are precepts as difficult to be complied with as is that of loving your enemies, and yet the observance

of them is imposed on every Christian without exception. The truth is, we must offer violence to nature; for *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent only bear it away.* Difficulty is no plea for exemption: nature must yield to grace; and charity must reign triumphant in your souls.

Great God! Thou alone canst heal the wounds which hatred has occasioned in my soul. Enable me by the powerful influence of thy grace to pardon the trivial injuries which I have received from the hands of my fellow-creatures, that Thou mayest be indulged to pardon the multiplied transgressions which I have committed against Thee.

Is it consistent that I, whose only security is in thy goodness and mercy, should be indignant at the smallest offence, and pursue the offender with relentless severity? Is there any comparison between the injuries which I have

received and those which I have so frequently offered to thy Sovereign Majesty?

No, it is not for a worm of the earth to exalt itself, and show forth its resentment on every occasion; and at the same time to expect that Thou—the Lord of all—shouldst humble thyself, and pass over unnoticed its crimes and rebellions against Thee.

What reason have I to be so tenacious of my reputation with men? In thy sight, O God! I am worthy only of contempt and ignominy: on account of my disgraceful defilements I have no right or title to the esteem or love of any creature whatsoever; and unless Thou neglectest the interest of thy own glory, I have no hope of salvation hereafter.

I will, therefore, for the time to come, pardon every injury, every affront; and I will love my friends in thee, and my enemies for thee: and

since thou hast promised to shew mercy to those who have shewn mercy, and to remit the sins of those who forgive the offences committed against them, I will rely on the accomplishment of this thy promise, and look forward with hope to the participation of those eternal mercies which Thou hast in store for those who are truly merciful.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON FINAL IMPENITENCE.

Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, . . . who mind earthly things.

Phil. iii. 18, 19.

TERRIBLE, my Christian brethren, is the solemn sentence contained in the words of this text, which is pronounced on those *who mind earthly things*, and who do not walk in the paths of justice and sanctity. Their *end is destruction.* No consoling pros-

pect is held out to them of mercy and reconciliation in their last moments: no hope is given that the tears and supplications which the terrifying approach of eternity will force from them on the bed of death, will ascend before his throne and disarm his justice. No: their *end is destruction.*

Where, then, perhaps you will say, is the infinite treasure of the mercies of God? Has he not declared that he willeth not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live? This, undoubtedly, is his declaration, and his word will not fall away. But he has no where declared that he will shew mercy to the dying sinner; on the contrary, he has declared that he will laugh in the destruction of those who have despised his counsels, and neglected his reprehensions; and will mock when that which they fear shall come upon them. These are they of whom it is written: *they shall call upon me,*

and I will not hear, (Prov. i. 2.); *they shall seek me, and shall die in their sins,* (John viii. 21.). It is impossible to listen to the awful menace of a sentence like this, coming, as it does, from the mouth of Truth itself, without a shuddering sense of the great danger which attends every wilful deviation from the path of righteousness. Unless we live as we desire to die; unless we take off our affections from worldly things, and walk in the paths of holiness during the days of our strength, our end will be destruction; our tears and supplications on the bed of death will avail us nothing; the Lord will not hear, and we shall die in our sins. It will not be so necessary to solicit your attention while I discuss this awful subject, as to endeavour to moderate your fears: I will, therefore, with the most tender circumspection, explain the reasons on the part of God,

why the repentance of the dying sinner is rejected.

1. It is an incontestable truth, that the Lord fixes limits to his patience, and that he seldom proceeds beyond them. In the treasures of his infinite mercies there is an appointed number of special favours destined for each individual: this number being received, and the effects frustrated by repeated crimes, the wrath of God is the immediate consequence; and the unhappy soul, who has neglected to profit by them, receives only the ordinary supplies of graces, with which it rarely happens that men are disposed to correspond in such a manner as to secure their eternal salvation.

The whole time of life, I acknowledge, is a time of mercy and salvation: we have it always in our power to return to God: at whatsoever time the sinner is converted from the error

of his ways, the Lord will shew him mercy; and no wound is incurable, as long as we can fix our eyes on the brazen serpent; that is, as long as the merits of our crucified Jesus are applicable to our souls. This, to be sure, is an undoubted truth. But neither is it to be doubted that every special grace which we abuse, may, for ought we know, be the last we are destined to receive; that the forbearance of God often gives way to his wrath; that the limits of this divine bounty are not extended to all alike; and that it will sometimes happen that a single transgression is capable of bringing down the sentence of reprobation on the head of the unhappy prevaricator: we know that he is *terrible in his counsels over the sons of men*, (Ps. lxv. 5.); and that no one *knoweth the power of* his *anger, and for* his *fear can number* his *wrath*, (Ps. lxxxix. 11.)

This is undeniable, for it is founded

on the authority of Truth itself. If, therefore, the scriptures uniformly testify that God sometimes withdraws himself from the obstinate sinner, and that, after having to no purpose opened the treasure of his mercies to him, he delivers him up to the error of his ways, at what period of life would this severity on the part of God be just and equitable, if not at the hour of death? He sometimes abandons the soul after the neglect of a few inspirations; and will he fly to the relief of the sinner who has spent his whole life in the flagrant abuse of all his graces and blessings, and that even at the very moment which he had marked out for the time of vengeance? Ah! where would be that inscrutable and unerring attribute of the Deity, which steeps its arrows in the blood of the impious, and which is not to be moved by the tears and supplications of his enemies in their affliction? What would become

of those terrible threats, which are so often denounced in the scriptures, and which cannot fail of their effect? When would the sinner be dealt with according to his works, if the hour of death was to be the hour of mercy and reconciliation? Would the patience and forbearance with which God endures the repeated insults of the sinner through life, be so terrible as the scriptures declare; were it to be terminated by a general act of pardon and oblivion? Would he be justly accounted severe, and most to be dreaded when he is slow to punish, if it were not in the order of his justice to execute judgment, and to inflict his vengeance once for all, at the close of life?

Allowing, however, that the justice of God may not be so inexorable, and that mercy may be extended to the dying sinner without any injury to this attribute; nevertheless, the grace of reconciliation at that critical time is of

so extraordinary a nature, that no sinner can entertain any reasonable hopes of being favoured with it. It is a grace, which is not only to change his heart, and convert him to the Lord, but which is to effect his justification; to establish him in a state of holiness, and to cause him to persevere even to the end. And what a grace, my beloved, is this! It is a grace that is reserved only for the elect: it is the greatest of all the gifts of God: it is the consummation of all graces: it is the last effort of love which God exerts in favour of his faithful servants: it is the fruit of a whole life of piety and holiness: it is a crown prepared for those only who have fought valiantly, and conquered. According to the rules of strict justice, it is a gift which God is not bound to impart to any one: he has sometimes refused it to men who, for a great length of time, had walked in the paths of holiness and

justice; and the deplorable end of Solomon is an example which in every age has struck terror into the heart of the pious and faithful Christian. And can the sinner presume on receiving this most signal of all blessings at the hour of death, after having rejected every other blessing during life? Can he flatter himself that he, who has been favoured with so many graces, and has abused them all, will be favoured with a grace which is not always given to those who have long been faithful? Can he entertain the thought that God will enrich his soul with the choicest gifts, because he returns to him at a time when he can sin no longer? My God! what an unfounded hope is this! how astonishing is it, that it should delude such a great proportion of the Christian world! The men, who crucify their flesh with its vices and concupiscences, that they may ensure to themselves the possession of this in-

estimable gift, tremble incessantly at the thought of the uncertainty whether it will be granted to them or not: sinners rely with confidence on receiving it, and instead of taking any precautions for ensuring to themselves the possession of it, are industriously labouring to increase the treasure of wrath which is already heaped up against them. Is this being actuated by principles of sound reason?

Supposing that God sometimes granted this invaluable gift to the sinner who had hitherto deferred his conversion, he certainly will not grant it to you, my brethern, if you defer your conversion with a view of making your peace with him on your death-bed. It may happen that the man, on whom the Lord has bestowed few extraordinary graces in life, and who has never entered sufficiently into himself to behold the irregularity of his conduct, and to perceive the opposition

that there was between his ways and the ways of the gospel; it may happen, I say, that such a man may open his eyes on the bed of death, and struck with astonishment and grief at the view of his past crimes, may lift up his supplicating hands to heaven, and with his eyes bathed in tears, and his heart overflowing with the purest sentiments of grief, may solicit grace and find pardon. The Lord may look down from his seat of mercy with compassion on the lost sheep which has then only discovered the error of his ways, and is desirous of returning immediately to the fold. But to the man, who has received every favour from God, who has been always convinced of the enormity of his crimes, who has been always tormented by the stings of confusion and remorse, who has been incessantly importuned by the interior inspirations of God to forsake his evil ways, and has hitherto resisted

them all, on the supposition that grace would be offered, and that it would be time enough to correspond with it on the bed of death, to such a man the grace of a perfect reconciliation is never granted. It is idle and impious for any man to flatter himself that he will be an exception to the general rule, and be treated with more mercy than others: this hope is criminal in itself, and will more assuredly draw down upon him the judgments that he feared. — Ah! there is scarcely a man living who does not a thousand times over form a resolution of forsaking his iniquities; and of the multitude of those who propose to do this, how rarely do we meet with an instance of one who is not cut off before he has the resolution to execute it? We all, like Balaam, desire to die the death of the just; but there are very few who desire to walk in their foot-steps during life.

But, perhaps, you will say, that many sinners, after a life spent in debauchery, and in the continual abuse of the graces of heaven, exhibit such extraordinary signs of repentance on their death-bed, that a reasonable hope may be entertained that the Lord was moved by their tears, and their sorrow was sufficiently intense to efface their former guilt. This is an error which too frequently inspires impenitent sinners with a fatal confidence. But it is of such men as these that the Lord speaks, when he says, they shall seek me, but they shall not find me: or in other words, these external signs of repentance I will not regard; they shall seek me, but they shall die in their sins.

2. This, my beloved, is a most alarming truth: it deprives the impenitent sinner of every hope of mercy. When I reflect on this; when I behold, on one side, the dying sinner lifting

up his supplicating hands to his offended God, and on the other, an avenging Deity turning away from him in wrath, and relentlessly shutting his ears to his agonizing cries; then it is that God appears to be that Great—that independent Being, who has no need of man. I place before my eyes the severity of his judgments; and a chilling horror pervades my whole frame. But how terrible soever his ways may appear to us, in Him, who hath truth and judgment, rely upon it, they are just and necessary.

I do not mean to insinuate that a single moment of true repentance would not be sufficient to efface the sins of a whole life: I know that God will never reject a contrite and humble heart. But the repentance of the dying sinner is rejected by him because it is not sincere. In the first place, it is not sincere, because it is not voluntary: it is caused merely by the prospect of ap-

proaching death. Were his days to be prolonged, he would return to his former ways. Had he received a positive assurance that his illness would not end in death, he would not be so solicitous to avert the indignation of heaven. Ah! as long as the danger was not apparent, he thought little of his sins; and he thought less of atoning for them by works of penance. And is itnot evident from hence that his grief is occasioned by the love of life, and not by the love of God? Is it not evident, that he did not intend to embrace the service of God, till such time as the world was slipping out of his hands?

Secondly, it is not sincere, because it is nothing more than a natural fear, excited by a view of the grave, and by the near prospect of eternal torments. He weeps; but his tears flow on account of his distress, and not on account of his sins. He prays; not as a

child supplicating the forgiveness of an injured and beloved parent; but as a criminal endeavouring to interest the feelings of his judge, and to obtain a respite. He detests his past sins, not on account of the outrage committed against the Majesty of God; but on account of the evils which they are about to entail upon himself. His own interest is the only cause of his grief, the only object of his supplications, and the only motives of his repentance. He made little account of the honour and glory of God in the midst of his unlawful pleasures; and he makes as little account of them even in his repentance. Ah! if he were assured that nothing was to be dreaded beyond the grave, and that hell was nothing more than a fable, he would care little about the insults that he had offered to the Almighty. Take away the dread that is upon him, and his sorrow and

repentance will soon be at an end: remove his apprehensions, and he will soon dry up his tears.

Ah, my God! Thou great Searcher of hearts! if I defer my repentance to that momentous hour, I shall not be able to impose upon thee by deceitful tears. My tears, like those of Esau and Antiochus, will be fruitless and vain. I shall be treated by thee, not as a sincere penitent humbly bewailing his disloyalties; but as a criminal trembling at the approach of his execution. Thou wilt perceive that the root of my passions will be even then subsisting in my soul; and I shall be accounted by thee equally as impure, as worldly, as voluptuous, as ambitious and revengeful, as during the days of my health and vigour: my fears will be occasioned by the same dread of suffering, which now causes me to shun the least pain and self-denial: my alarms will be increased in proportion

to the love which I now feel for ease and enjoyment: and, O just God! can I suppose that thou wilt be moved by tears, which are excited by the same self love, which has been all along the principal cause of my rebellions against thy holy laws?

In this manner will sinners raise their voice to heaven in the midst of their distress; and a just God *will laugh in their destruction*, (Prov. i. 26.) They will weep; but his justice *will mock when that* is *come upon them, which* they *feared*, (Ib.) They will strike their breasts; but their hearts will not be softened. They will promise to observe his laws with more fidelity, if he restore them again to health; and he will treat their promises with derision, because he well knows that they are not truly reformed, and that the only use they would make of health, would be to increase the catalogue of their crimes. They will exhort the sorrow-

ful spectators of their death, to take warning by their example, and to serve God in the days of their strength: and he will say to them, *why dost thou declare my justices, and take my covenant in thy mouth?* (Ps. xlix. 16.) They will cry to the Lord: O Lord *enter not into judgment with thy servant,* (Ps. cxlii. 2.) and he will reply, thou art *already judged.* They will say, O God of mercy and compassion! thou art come to save sinners; and he will answer, *there is no salvation for the impious.* They will say, O Saviour of mankind! I place my confidence in the infinite treasures of thy mercies; and he will reply, *the hopes of the sinner shall perish with him.* They will say, O divine Shepherd of our souls! thou dost not reject the lost sheep that returns to thee; and he will answer, *there is a time for pardon, and a time for punishment.* They will say, O Jesus! I commend my soul into thy

hands; and he will reply, thou art none of mine: thy soul I will receive; but I will receive it only for the purpose of making it the victim of my eternal justice: thy fruitless sighs, and unavailing supplications, shall be the subject only of my derision and scorn.

What state, my brethren, can be more terrible than this? The minister of the Lord, whose assistance they had rejected in health, but who is now summoned to their bed-side, exhorts them to repentance, although he has little hopes of its efficacy. — He describes in the most moving terms the mercies of the Lord; although he adores, in secret, the inscrutable depths of his justice. By every artifice of charity he endeavours to diminish in their eyes the enormity of their crimes, in order to preserve them from despair; but he knows that the Lord has his own weights and measures, and

that it is not in the power of mortal man to lessen them. He declares that a sincere repentance, although only of a few moments duration, will be admitted by God, and be sufficient to ensure their salvation; but he knows, at the same time, that this is a miracle of grace; and that it is a hopeless thing when the soul of man has nothing else to depend on.

In conclusion, I will suggest one reflection more to sinners of this description, if there are any (which God forbid) in the number of my present hearers. Is there any thing you can desire more favourable at the hour of death, than time and opportunity to look into yourselves, to receive the rites of the Church, and to offer up to God the tears of grief and repentance for the sins of your past lives? Nevertheless, (I tremble while I speak it) nevertheless what hope does our Saviour allow you to entertain that your

prayers and tears will be accepted by him, if you defer your repentance to your death-bed? *You shall seek me, and you shall die in your sins,* (John viii. 21.). This is his solemn declaration. What, then, must we think of the death of those of our friends and acquaintances, who, after a life of worldly dissipation, or criminal excess, gave signs of repentance in their last moments? Will you say of the inveterate sinner, whose fears were excited at that time by the view of the judgments of heaven, that God gave him grace to die like a Christian? that, although his life was dissipated, his death was most edifying? and that you would esteem it a happiness were you to die in the same manner? I do not pretend to fix limits to the mercies of God. But what foundation have you to presume that he made his peace effectually with God? You may say that he sought Jesus; but did he find him?

You may say, that he bathed his feet, like Magdalen, with his tears; but did he hear those consoling words, *thy sins are forgiven thee?* All that I can say, is, that our Lord has declared that *they shall seek* him, *and shall not find* him, and that *they shall die in their sins.* All that I can say, is, that the holy fathers have always spoken of the repentance of dying sinners in terms the most alarming. All that I can say, is, that the scriptures declare that the number of those who are saved is very small; whereas if the marks of repentance, which are given by dying sinners, always proceeded from a heart that was truly contrite and truly reformed, almost every sinner would be saved, and the reprobate would be those few only who defied the anger and the judgments of God even to the end. All that I can say, is, that we must do penance whilst we have health and time; and that on the bed of

death we either shall not be able to seek Jesus, or if we do seek him, we shall not find him; and consequently, that, if we defer our repentance till that time, we shall die in our sins; because repentance till that time is almost always impossible, or, at best, so extremely equivocal and defective as to leave little or no hopes of a favourable result.——Would to God that these menaces may not be applicable to any one in this assembly; but that every individual may experience in his last moments that death is the passage to a happy immortality.

LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE LAW OF GOD.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.
Matt. xxiv. 35.

IT is not uncommon in these days of tepidity and dissipation to call in question the immutability of the law of God, to substitute customs and human traditions in the place of its inviolable ordinances, and to accommodate it to times and circumstances. The doctrine, that the gospel will ad-

mit of no mitigation, and that the same rigorous discharge of every duty which it enjoins, has been and is required of every Christian in every age and nation, is a doctrine which strikes terror into the hearts of the dissipated and relaxed disciples of Jesus of the present times. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should be controverted; and that men should pretend to discover in the total change of habits, customs, and sentiments, that has taken place since the first propagation of the gospel, and likewise in the peculiar circumstances in which they are situated, sufficient reasons to authorize a relaxation of its severity. But, my brethren, the words which I have selected for my text declare that the law of God is unchangeable, and that although heaven and earth were entirely to pass away or be dissolved, his word would never pass away.

The mind of man, I allow, is liable

to changes; every age has its peculiar customs and manners, and these customs and manners influence our conduct. But the law of God is not liable to such vicissitude; it is the same in all ages and nations, and on that account it ought to be the constant and invariable rule of our actions.

I allow, likewise, that the observance of the law is attended with more or less difficulty, with more or less inconvenience, according to the dispositions of the individual, or the state of life in which he is engaged. But the law is always the same, and applies equally to all; and on that account, neither difficulty nor inconvenience will justify the violation of it. The investigation of this subject will open a wide field for consideration, and I hope will contribute to awaken you out of that dangerous lethargy in which so many of our brethren pass their days.

1. In the first ages of the Church,

the Christian writers remarked that the morality and doctrine of the Pagans varied according to times and circumstances. The philosophers, says Tertullian, were not enlightened from above; they were influenced by the corruption of their own hearts, and in their determination of good and evil were left to the weakness and blindness of their imaginations. Having, therefore, no fixed and solid foundation on which to build their system of religious truth, they were liable to error; and it is not surprising that their moral code was subject to change, and that their doctrines were accommodated to the times, instead of the times being reformed by their doctrines.

But, continues the same author, truth is always essentially the same: its immutability is derived from the immutability of God himself: his wisdom, his sanctity, and his justice, form the basis on which its moral code is found-

ed, and it is not in the power of man to expunge or to soften down the least tittle of it.

Now it is truly astonishing that Christians who have received this eternal law, and acknowledge that their conduct must be regulated by it, should pretend that it is subject to change like the doctrines of the ancient philosophers, and that the rigorous duties which it prescribed in the primitive times, are not of equal force in the present degenerate and corrupted state of mankind.

Let no man, who has any value for the interests of his immortal soul, ever think thus: the gospel is unchangeable: although all things change around it, it alone does not change. The duties which it prescribes are proportioned to the nature and necessities of man, and are consequently adapted for all ages and nations. It will always be the law to regulate times and

customs; and it will not pass away even when the heavens and the earth pass away, and give place to the new heavens and new earth which are to succeed. Such as it was when the primitive Christians received it at its first promulgation, the same it was when delivered to us; the same it will be when delivered to posterity; and the same it will be when adored and loved by the blessed in the mansions of eternal happiness. The fervour or the tepidity of its followers can neither add to or diminish any thing of its mildness or its rigour: the zeal or the condescension of man can make them neither more austere nor more easy. It is that eternal gospel, which the angel in the Apocalypse announces from the highest heavens to all nations, and to all tongues, (*Rev.* xiv. 6.)

Nevertheless, when we describe to you in the conduct of the first disciples of the faith an exact representation of

the fulfilment of the gospel duties, and from the description of their retired and mortified life, their hatred of the world, their assiduity at the public service of God in his temple, their charity and brotherly love, their contempt of all that passes with time, and their ardent longings to be united to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their hope; when, I say, from the description of these things, we endeavour to convey a just idea of the dissimilarity there is between your manners and theirs, and to prove that you are so far removed from the kingdom of God; instead of being alarmed and terrified at the view of a dissimilarity, which is so great that an unbeliever would not imagine that you were disciples of the same Jesus, or followers of the same gospel, you censure our importunities, and say that it is to no purpose to talk of former times; that we must take mankind as they are; that primitive fervour

and primitive morals have suffered too great a diminution ever to be restored; and that to hold out the necessity of living as they did, is, in fact, to declare that salvation is no longer attainable by the present race of men.

But, my beloved, what is your object in this reply? Is it to prove that, in proportion as times and ages have diminished the purity of the Christian world, the purity of the gospel has diminished also? that its laws have become milder, and more indulgent to the passions, in proportion as the passions themselves are become more headstrong? and that the decay of morality has mitigated the severity of the precepts of Jesus? If this is your meaning, you are, indeed, most woefully mistaken. When our Lord foretold in the gospel, that in the latter times—the times in which we unfortunately live, faith would hardly be found on the earth, that his name

would almost be forgotten, that his precepts would be incompatible with the prevailing maxims and customs, that the just themselves would be in danger of contracting defilement from the general contagión, and of being carried away by the torrent of bad example, he did not say that, in order to accommodate himself to the corruption of these times, he would remit something of the severity of his gospel; that he would acknowledge the expediency of substituting the customs which ignorance and depravity would establish, in the place of the rules and maxims of his law; that he would exact infinitely less from his disciples, than what he exacted from the first Christians; and that his kingdom, which he had promised only to the violent, should then be gained by the indolent and slothful: on the contrary, he admonished his apostles, that in these latter times it would be more necessary

than ever to watch, to pray, to fast, to flee to the mountains in order to avoid the general corruption: he repeated his admonition; *watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, lest any of those things come upon you that are to happen,* (Luke xxi. 36.)

In fact, my beloved, it is consonant with reason that our piety should be the more fervent and attentive, in proportion as iniquity is known to gain ground; that we should apply more constantly to prayer and good works, in proportion as we are surrounded by dangers. The degeneracy of mankind, therefore, imposes additional obligations on us; and salvation, instead of being attained with more ease, is attained with more difficulty now, than it was in the former ages.

In the second place, can it be said that the rigorous precepts of the gospel, the maxims of self denial,—of patient suffering,—of contempt of the world,

—of humility,—of charity, were to be enforced only in the primitive times? Can it be supposed that the austere doctrine of Jesus was intended only for those chaste, those innocent, those fervent and pious souls, who sacrificed riches, honours, pleasures, friends, relatives, and every thing else for the love of their Master; and who, not unfrequently, preserved the grace which they received in baptism without spot or stain, until they were summoned to render an account of their works? Can it be supposed that Jesus imposed a heavier yoke on them on account of their zeal and fidelity in his service, and that he reserved his benevolence and indulging forbearance for the times when his service would be neglected, and his precepts despised? Oh! were this the truth, the boasted equity and wisdom of the Christian code of morality would be lost: more would be required of him who owed

less! the greater the transgressions, the milder the sentence would be of course! the road to heaven would be less rugged for the sinner than for the just! the more that men were in love with vice, the less need would there be of virtue!

Let it not, therefore, be alledged by Christians as a justification of their conduct, that the times are no longer the same; the change of times does not operate a change in the laws of God. Let it not be said as an excuse, that primitive fervour is too far relaxed to be restored: the general restoration of it is not required at your hands; restore it in your own breasts, and you will have fulfilled your whole duty. Let it not be said that Christians formerly were endued with greater strength, or that they were blessed with more powerful graces than Christians of the present times: they were distinguished from us only by their

more lively faith,—their more intrepid constancy,—their more ardent love of Jesus,—and their more sincere contempt of the world and its fleeting vanities: these were their only distinctions.

Have not we the same source of grace to apply to as they had? Have not we the same ministry,—the same altar,—the same victim? Is not the Lord prepared to extend the same mercies to us as to them? Is his arm shortened, or is his love diminished? Ah! we have living proofs of the contrary before our eyes. There are in the midst of us, even in these degenerate times, just men,—men of the most pious and exemplary lives, whose fervour, zeal, and love, remind us of the first ages, and demonstrate that the precepts of the gospel may be fulfilled with the same facility and exactness by modern Christians as they were by our pious ancestors. Let it not, therefore, be

said, that *former times were better than they are now: for this manner of question is foolish*, says the wise man, (Eccl. vii. 11.) At no time was it ever pleasing to corrupt nature, to follow Jesus: at no time will it cease to be necessary for the Christian to take up his cross, to withdraw his affections from the world, to have his conversation in heaven, and to live like a stranger on earth. The saints in all ages had the same passions to subdue, the same abuses to avoid, the same dangers to fear, and the same obstacles to surmount as we ourselves have; and the only difference that exists between them and us is, that they had not only customs and manners to renounce, not only the derisions of the world to despise, but frequently the most cruel tortures to endure. Their profession of the Christian name deprived them of all the comforts and advantages of this world, caused them to be a proscribed

race, and exposed them to the fury of enraged tyrants and persecutors. They were spectacles both to angels and to men: they were hated by the Jew, and despised by the Gentile: they were the outcasts of the whole world. These were their trials: this was the price which they paid for the kingdom of heaven. But their faith was not to be shaken: they submitted to all with joy, knowing that the sufferings of this life were not worthy to be compared with the glory which was to be revealed in them. We, on the other hand, have only to renounce the criminal abuses of the world, and to contemn the derisions of the unwise: these are the only exterior trials to which we are exposed, and yet we complain that they are above our strength!— No: my beloved, the law of God is unchangeable in its duration: it is the same for all times and for all places; it may be fulfilled by us with as great,

perhaps greater facility than it was by the primitive Christians; and consequently there is no excuse, however plausible, that will in the least degree extenuate the crime of those men who wilfully abuse and deliberately transgress it in the sight of God.

In addition to this, the law is immutable in its extent. It acknowledges no exception of persons. It is the same for the rich as for the poor; it imposes the same obligations on the king as on the beggar. The law of Moses was for one nation only; but Jesus is an universal legislator; he came to unite all mankind under one general system of obedience, and out of all states and conditions to form one body animated by the same spirit, and governed by the same laws. In vain, therefore, shall we attempt to set up a claim to any exemption: there can be no immunity: either we must withdraw ourselves entirely from the co-

venant, or be wholly subject to it. Having all of us entered into the same engagements in baptism, it is clear that all of us will have to render the same account. In fact, my brethren, what are the duties of the gospel? They may be reduced to two heads: to resist and weaken the corrupt inclinations of the flesh; and to perfect in our souls the grace which we received at the sacred font. The first requires that we deny ourselves, that we practice mortifications, and that we renounce the suggestions of self-will; the second is to be compleated by prayer, retirement, watchfulness, contempt of the world, and fervent desires of the things above. This is, in substance, the whole of our gospel duties; and can any of them be dispensed with as unnecessary? I maintain that they cannot: unless the rich are strictly attentive to them, they will be overpowered by the allurements of pleasure,

and by the temptations of the world; they will be intoxicated with vanity, and will be caught in the snares that are laid for them on every side: unless the poor are strictly attentive to them, their spirits will be broken by the hardships of want; their minds will be distracted by solicitude and anxiety; and their thoughts will be entirely taken off from that which alone is capable of imparting consolation to them. In a word, there is no situation in life in which the fulfilment of these duties is not indispensably necessary for salvation.

This is an incontestable truth, founded on the authority of the unerring word of God himself; and therefore it is in vain to seek for pretexts to authorize an exemption from any the least part of them. That we may experience difficulties; that we may meet with some inconveniences; that we may be exposed to dangers, and suffer

some loss in our temporal concerns or possessions, is, indeed, all very possible; but nothing of all this will justify our departure from the paths of rectitude. We must be ready to pluck out the eye that scandalizeth us, and cut off the hand that offendeth us: we must be ready to make the most painful sacrifices, rather than be deficient in our allegiance to the Lord of All. If nature be averse to the practice of the more painful duties, we must fight against nature; we must subdue nature, and reduce it into subjection to the spirit. If the passions are violent, we must be violent in our opposition to them; we must keep up a continual warfare against them, and not desist till we have gained a complete victory. Our great Lawgiver did not pretend to form a system of morality that would be accommodated to the inclinations of flesh and blood: he did

not profess to prescribe duties which would not encroach on the passions, and which would not be binding when inconveniences and difficulties might happen to occur: on the contrary, he declared that he came, not to bring peace, but a sword; that he came to *set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law,* (Matt. x. 35.) and that he came to point out to him a path that was rugged and strewed with thorns. This was the object of our Saviour's mission; and can it be supposed that the hardships and labours which were particularly intended to wean our affections from earthly things, are sufficient reasons to exempt us from the obligation of fulfilling the law itself?

Ah! if we examine minutely into the cause of all that opposition which is experienced, and of all those pre-

texts which are alledged by worldlings, we shall discover that the passions are the source from which they spring, and we shall be convinced that men would not pursue a line of conduct directly opposite to the gospel, and would not endeavour to justify themselves, notwithstanding the evidence of the law by which they are condemned, were it not that they preferred their ease, their convenience, their interests in this world, before the glory of God and their own salvation.

Let us, my beloved, die to the world and to our passions; that is, let us take off our affections from the perishable things of this world, and open our hearts freely to the communications of heavenly love, and we shall then acknowledge that the law of God is unchangeable; we shall then be convinced that every duty is practicable; that difficulties are not to be attended to, and that the inconveniences, which

before appeared of such importance in our eyes, are nothing more than trials, —the inseparable accompaniments of virtue. It is easy to find excuses when the mind is averse to any duty: the passions never want pretexts: self-love will throw a favourable light over every action, and justify the most palpable violations of the law of God. How many are there in the Christian world who pass their lives in this manner, endeavouring to seduce themselves! who adopt every means of obscuring the light of faith; and who eagerly seek after and approve of every argument that authorizes the gratification of the passions! Yes: how many are there, whose only care, and reflection, and talents, and wisdom, and counsel, are employed in forming a bandage for themselves, with which their eyes may be blindfolded, and their danger concealed from their sight until the fatal moment

arrive when the most dreadful of all calamities is destined to fall upon them!

May this, my beloved, never be the unhappy lot of any one in this assembly. For this purpose, let us walk honestly as in the day, bearing in mind that our only security is in fulfilling all the laws and commandments of God without mitigation or diminution. Then we may reasonably expect that the gospel, after having been the rule of our conduct on earth, will be our eternal consolation in the regions of inexpressible bliss.

ON THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR BLESSED LADY.

Shew me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou lyest in the mid-day. . . . . . Cant. i. 6.

THIS is the language of the just man during his abode upon the earth. At a distance from his beloved, from whom he is separated by the veil of his mortality, and experiencing nothing here below that can satisfy the ardent longings of his soul, but the hopes of being speedily united to him; sighing incessantly for the happy moment when the heavens will be opened,

and the gates of his beloved be manifested to him in its fullest splendor, he incessantly cries out: *O thou, whom my soul loveth, shew me where thou feedest, where thou lyest in the mid-day.*

These desires, I acknowledge, are too frequently weakened by the connection which necessarily subsists between mortal man and the world. Visible things create in him many attachments, divide his affections, and cause him to be in love with his mortal state, even at the time that he is sighing after the good things of the world to come. This total alienation of the affections from creatures, this grief at the long continuance of our exile here below, this joy and delight at the sight of death and at the near approach of the dissolution of our mortality, was, never, by many degrees, so perfect in any creature purely human, as it was in Mary; and consequently, she was supereminently entitled, on this

day of her triumph, in quality of the true spouse, to hold this language of love: *O thou, whom my soul loveth, shew me where thou feedest, where thou lyest in the mid-day.* A few reflections on the glory which attended the death of this venerable Mother of our Lord Jesus shall form the subject of my address to you on this festival.

1. It is invariably the order of Divine Providence, to visit his chosen servants with humiliations and disgraces before men, proportioned to the degree of holiness and justice to which he proposes to raise them. He appears to be, as it were, jealous of the glory of being the sole author of their fidelity: he will not suffer them to shine with any other light than what proceedeth immediately from himself; he is eager to deprive them of the greatness which the world is capable of bestowing, and to reduce them to a condition in which they become more worthy

of that true greatness, which is derived from serving and loving him alone.

The humiliations of Mary during her earthly pilgrimage bear ample testimony to the truth of this observation. The degree of glory and honour to which she was raised, was the highest that could possibly be attained by any pure creature; and the path by which she was led to it, was the path of obscurity and reproach. Her titles were supereminently great and glorious: she was descended from the royal stock of David: she was immaculate even in her conception: she was a virgin after she had brought into the world her only begotten Son: she was vested with the supreme dignity of Mother of God;—a dignity, which reflected an additional splendor on all her other titles, both of nature and grace: and yet, not one of these titles was acknowledged and revered by the world during her

mortal existence. Her high birth was concealed under the veil of poverty: her extraordinary graces were hidden in the obscurity of a simple and retired life: her elevated dignity, and her august title of Mother of God, were not distinguishable, because there was no visible distinction between her Son and other men: Judea considered her merely as the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, and placed her upon the same level as other matrons of her nation. The world was not informed of the great things which the Lord had wrought in her; she herself did not seek to be exalted in the public esteem: she willingly consented to be deprived of all her glory; she submitted to the privation with joy: not a word escaped from her lips which could betray the secret of her exalted condition: her only desire, her only solicitude was that the glory of her Son should be known, and his king-

kingdom established over the whole earth.

By such degrading and humiliating steps as these did the wisdom of God prepare this his chosen vessel of grace for the glory to which she was to be raised on this day. Her whole solicitude had been to conceal herself from the eyes of men, and to live without distinction or rank amongst the matrons of Israel; and the solicitude of God seems to have been to raise her to a state of supereminent glory at her death, and to distinguish her from the rest of human kind by such a singular privilege as would proclaim to future ages her august title of Mother of God. Her pure and sacred body, like that of her Son, was not abandoned to corruption: the power of the Father raised it, as is piously believed, from the dead: the heavens opened to receive her, glorious and triumphant: she ascended from the tomb encircled

with rays of the purest light, to take possession of her seat of glory at the right hand of her Son; she ascended with the same body which had given birth to that glorious flesh which opened heaven to all mankind: she was seated above all the principalities and powers. She was the true ark of Israel, says the pious St. Francis of Sales, which, after it had been concealed for a time under tents in the desert, in a state of obscurity, was at length introduced with pomp and solemnity, by the true David, into the heavenly Jerusalem. This was the magnificent reward which God had prepared for his chosen servant. She willingly consented that all her excellent gifts and honours should be concealed from the eyes of men during the days of her mortal life; and God exalted her at her death by raising her sacred body from the grave, and placing it at the right hand of the huma-

nity which his only Son had assumed for the salvation of men.

Now, my beloved, let us turn to ourselves, and examine whether we are ready to submit to the humiliations which the providence of God is pleased to send us? Are we content that our good qualities, our talents, our acquirements, our virtues, should be concealed from the public eye? Do we not rather endeavour to exhibit ourselves always in the most favourable colours? Is it not our chief study to gain the esteem and approbation of our fellow creatures? Where is the man who is willing and desirous that the world should be unacquainted with those traits in his character which would raise him in the estimation of the public? Is such a man frequently to be found? Ah! we all seek for honour: we all seek for glory in the sight of men. It is our desire that they should behold, as if stamped on our

foreheads, our virtues, our talents, our honours, our learning, and our acquirements: even in our works of piety it too frequently happens that our eyes are secretly directed to the applause of others; else, why seek for distinction? why, in the very sanctuary itself, and at a moment when we come to present ourselves before a God, who humbled himself even to the death of the cross, why contend, as many do, for the paltry advantage of rank and precedence over those about us, who with equal, or perhaps superior merit to distinguish them, are not raised by birth or fortune to an equal footing with ourselves?

2. Mary, in addition to the humiliations above described, was constrained, during the whole of her mortal life, to live in a constant state of submission and dependance. At one time she was subject to the will of Joseph; at another, she was dependent on the

commands and labours of her son; at another, she was under the care and authority of the beloved disciple, and considered him as her master and director. She submitted to this state of obedience and subjection with cheerful tranquillity, as being the path by which the Almighty intended to conduct her to eternal happiness. After the resurrection of our Lord, she followed the disciples without any distinction of rank or pre-eminence. She, who was blessed above all women, who was ennobled by the highest title that could be given to any pure creature, who was the great support upon earth of the rising Church after the death of her Son, she assumes to herself no authority whatever; she leaves the government of the Church in the hands of its Pastors, and reserves to herself no other glory than that of submitting implicitly to their decisions. What an example is this! how worthy to be

proposed to those haughty and restless Christians, who do not partake of her gifts and endowments, and who will not imitate her submission and obedience.

But on this day Mary takes possession of that power which she sacrificed to the will of the Almighty during her abode upon earth: she enters upon all her rights. She is constituted, under Christ, the mediatrix of the faithful, the hope and support of the Church, the refuge of sinners, the protectress of the just, the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Yes: my beloved, the power of Mary is confined within no other limits than those which the love of her Son has been pleased to fix. He makes her the distributor of his graces; he encourages our addresses to her as a most powerful advocate in our behalf; and has shewn, on innumerable occasions, that nothing is so opposite to the genuine spirit and pure principles

of his religion, as to pretend to uphold the dignity, and encrease our veneration for the glorious power of the Son of God, by diminishing that of his holy Mother. In honouring her, we honour him. We extol his gifts, when we extol the ineffable qualities of Mary. She, as well as ourselves, is indebted to him for all that she possesses, or ever did possess: and our confidence in her intercession is excited by nothing more than the wonders which he has vouchsafed to work by her.

It must not, however, be supposed that our salvation will be effected by merely placing ourselves under the protection of Mary, and soliciting her intercession. Far otherwise; salvation depends on the observance of the whole law of God. The man who continues to love the world, who is a slave to sensual pleasures, who does not resist the impetuosity of his crimi-

nal passions, will not be benefited by his applications to Mary. She turns away from him: she considers him as the enemy of her Son: she detests the confidence which he places in her, as being injurious to the honour and glory of the Deity. She is ready, indeed, to assist by her mediation those sinners who are sincerely desirous of returning from the ways of error; but she solicits that punishment should be inflicted on those who go on in sin upon the presumption that her mediation will secure them from the effects of the justice of God.

Ah! if Jesus Christ acknowledges those only for his mother and his brethren, who do the will of his heavenly Father, can it be supposed that Mary will reckon among the number of her clients the transgressors of this holy will, and the enemies of the doctrine and cross of her Son? Were she to act in this manner, she would be the pro-

tectress and encourager of the very passions which her Son came to resist and subdue: her power would tend to the destroying the work of the gospel: her interference would be a direct attempt to open a way to heaven very different from that which was traced out by her Redeemer. No: my beloved, Mary is considered by the Church as the firm support of our weakness, but not the encourager of our passions; as a sure resource in the midst of dangers, but not the protectress of our crimes. Those only are her clients, who adhere to her Son; and the only way of ensuring to ourselves her mediation and assistance, is to show forth in our lives that piety, that innocence, that charity, and those other virtues which made her so acceptable in the sight of her great Creator.

3. Another humiliation of Mary during her mortal life, was the confu-

sion which must have necessarily attended the discovery of her pregnancy by Joseph. This trial she bore in silence: she did not attempt to vindicate herself: she did not disclose the great mystery which had been wrought in her. She bowed submissively to the will of God: she resigned her reputation, and her whole self, entirely into his hands, and joyfully consented to endure the humiliation and shame, till he, in his wisdom, should vouchsafe to manifest this mystery to the world.

The trial, undoubtedly, was severe; and the reward was proportioned to her patience in enduring it. No sooner had death loosened the bands of her mortality, than she was glorified by the veneration and homage of mankind. All nations and all people have heard the wonders which God had wrought in her. Wherever the glory of Jesus has penetrated, and formed a congregation of true believers, there is she

likewise honoured and praised. She was no sooner departed from the earth, than apostolic men addressed their supplications to her, and entreated her mediation. Those happy times were the first that witnessed the respect and veneration of the faithful for Mary. The honours that were then paid to this Queen of Heaven must have been great and solemn; for it is recorded that some ignorant and superstitious Christians carried their veneration even to an excess, and fell into idolatry: they offered sacrifice to her, and worshipped her with that worship which was due only to the Deity. In proportion as the Christian faith was propagated, the devotion to Mary was extended over the earth. After the peace of the Church was established by the Christian Emperors, the respect and homage paid to Mary became more solemn and universal in proportion as the faithful were enabled to ce-

lebrate the holy mysteries with greater magnificence and pomp. In vain did a few restless and haughty spirits pretend to dispute her title of Mother of God. Their blasphemies contributed only to rouse the piety of the faithful: in every place altars and temples were consecrated under her protection and name, to the glory of her Son: councils were assembled, in order to defend her honour and dignity against the attacks of these innovators, and by their solemn decisions to proclaim to succeeding generations the respect and veneration which they and their forefathers entertained for this purest of all creatures. Thus the only effect produced by the temporary propagation of this erroneous opinion, (and it is the common fate of all opinions that are erroneous) was the establishment of the truth in its fullest lustre.

Whole cities, and even empires, ever placed themselves under her powerful

protection: separate communities of each sex were formed in her name, and under her patronage were illustrious for their piety and fidelity to the great Author of their existence. This kingdom, before it was separated from the centre of unity, and delivered up to the horrors of religious animosity and dissension, was distinguished for its respect and veneration for this illustrious Virgin. Our kings considered her, under her Son, as the protectress of their states: our most holy prelates were the most zealous promoters of her glory, and most earnestly encouraged the faithful to solicit her intercession and assistance before the throne of grace. This they did; and this they were authorized to do by the examples of those apostolic men, who were commissioned and sent by the holy Pope Gregory to establish in this island the faith of Jesus on the ruins of superstition and idolatry. The an-

cient and universal faith, the faith of Christ and his apostles, is no longer the established faith of this nation: error and dissension have taken its place. But the mercies of the Lord are not wholly withdrawn: a small number continue to exist in the land, who still adhere to the universal faith of all ages, and maintain the honour and dignity of her who is honoured by the whole court of heaven. Let us, therefore, be more fervent in our applications to Mary, in proportion as her patronage is disregarded and despised by those around us. Our devotion, however, must be regulated according to the maxims of faith. We have only one supreme Mediator, who is our Lord Jesus Christ: he mediates for us by his blood, and claims, as it were, by right, graces and blessings from his Father on account of his own merits. Mary is not a mediator of this description: as a creature wholly dependent on God, she can claim nothing by

virtue of her own right, from the great Giver of all good gifts. Her mediation is nothing more than intercession, or uniting her prayers with ours, and offering them conjointly to her divine Son, the great Mediator between God and his creatures. This intercession, however, is powerful; and the more earnestly we petition for it, the more confidently we may expect to receive from the hands of God the blessings which are requisite for the redress of our spiritual necessities. But we must not forget that, it is in vain to solicit the intercession of Mary, unless we endeavour to extirpate our vicious inclinations, and to live in conformity with the precepts of the gospel.

Thus was the death of Mary glorious and triumphant; and such, whenever it pleases God to take him to his rest, will be the death of the just man. It is not easy to reflect on this without

being struck with the astonishing contrast which is presented to us in the deplorable death of the sinner. Ah! my beloved friends, death puts a final period to the glory of the man who forgets God during the days of health and vigour. The tyrant with an irresistible grasp seizes on all that belonged to him; he suffers him to enjoy no longer any of those things that appeared great and good in the eyes of men; and he throws him unprotected and helpless into the hands of a terrible God. The circle of friends and relatives, in the midst of which he lived as if he had been immortal, can afford him no assistance. Like men, who from the cliffs behold a fellow mortal vainly struggling against the waves, and at length sinking into the bosom of the unrelenting deep, they can do no more than utter forth their unavailing lamentations, and supplicate heaven for his deliverance. He himself

fights the battle of death alone: he can receive no succours from any created being; and his God he has neglected and insulted. Oh! what a state is this! The past appears like a vapour, which glittered for a moment, and disappeared; the future, like an unfathomable abyss, into which he is about to plunge, dreadfully uncertain as to his final lot. The world, which he had hitherto loved as something real and substantial, proves to be nothing but smoke: eternity, which he had disregarded as unworthy of his serious consideration, proves to be real and substantial. He is enlightened, but his heart is not changed. He is sorrowful, but he is not repentant. His body is delivered up a prey to the vilest insects; his career of glory is ended; his name is forgotten: but his soul lives for ever, separated from her God, and consigned to that place of darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But to the just man death appears in the same light as it has always done. The tyrant deprives him of nothing that he values. No: he is disengaged in affection from the world, and all its vanities and follies: he is full of good works: he is ripe for heaven. He shuts his eyes without regret to all terrestrial things: he flies into the bosom of God, from whence he came, and where he had always dwelt in desire, and he enters with peace and joy into a happy eternity.

ALL SAINTS.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF THE JUST IN THIS LIFE.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted, . . . Matt. v. 5.

WERE I to address you in the language of the world, I should say: blessed are they that rejoice and are glad; blessed are they that are strangers to affliction and mourning; blessed are they that live in the midst of prosperity, health, and tranquillity, and possess all that their hearts can desire. This would be my language, because this is the language of the world.

But as a minister of the Most High, as a messenger of truth, it is my duty to address you in words of a far different import: it is my duty to expose to view the fallacious maxims of the world, and to describe with justness and sincerity the means of attaining to that state of happiness which is desired and sought after by every individual of the human race.

The authority on which I shall found my arguments will not be the judgment of the world, but the unerring testimony of truth itself: that authority, which declares in the words of my text that they who mourn are blessed, because they shall be comforted. The relation which subsists between the happiness of man in the present stage of his existence, and that which is attainable in a future world, is of the closest kind. They are nearly similar. I know that this is not a maxim which is at all suited to the habits and opi-

nions of the world; but, contrary to the world's opinion and its settled practice, I contend that they are, in a manner, identified. Both are founded in the same principles, and are dependent upon the same cause: and whatever our enjoyment may be at present, and however gratifying it may be to our natural inclinations, if it does not perfectly correspond with the happiness we all hope for in the world to come, it ought rather to be looked upon as a delusion, than as a taste of real happiness. No reflexion, that can occupy your attention, can be more appropriate on a day, when we are invited by the Church to celebrate the memory of our brethren who are gone before us with the sign of faith, and are admitted into the mansions of eternal bliss; none, I believe, which can be better calculated to encourage you to walk in the same paths of holiness and virtue in which they walked.

For this reason, I shall enter into an explanation of the great affinity, which subsisted between the happiness the saints enjoyed on earth, and the happiness they now enjoy in heaven, and shall take occasion, from this circumstance, to shew that their former happiness on earth was far superior to any which the votaries of pleasure can possibly promise themselves in the delusive appearance of worldly happiness. —In the first place, the Saints were happy on earth, because, being raised by faith above the things of this world, they were not to be affected by those disquietudes and cares which rob the worlding of his peace: and secondly, they were happy, because the superior consolations of heaven, induced them to resist the impetuosity of the passions, and to renounce those unworthy gratifications in which the worldling seeks for happiness, but which in reality are the chief source of all his wo.

1. The unhappiness of people in the world is chiefly owing to their misconceptions respecting the real nature of what are called the blessings and the evils of this life. The just are more enlightened: they are the children of light: they see the things of this world in their true colours, naked and undisguised. This heavenly wisdom enables them to submit to labours and sufferings with chearful patience, and to discover abundant motives for consolation in the very source from whence the sorrows of worldlings are derived.

In order that you may be convinced of the truth of an assertion, which is so honourable to the cause of virtue and holiness, nothing more will be required than to shew the different effects which the consideration of the past, the view of present things, and the prospect of the future, produce in the minds of the virtuous and of the dissolute.

In the first place, the effect which the consideration of the past produces in the minds of the dissolute is painful in the extreme. There is no one so abandoned, so absorbed in the pleasures of the world, as not to be constrained to reflect, from time to time, on the years that he has devoted to vanity and intemperance. In the hours of silent retirement every sinner is roused from his lethargy by the terrific voice of conscience: the days which he has mispent, and which seemed to have been buried for ever in the deep abyss of oblivion, present themselves before him, and the whole catalogue of his crimes collected into one point of view stares him in the face. Then it is that he beholds the graces which he has abused,—the inspirations which he has neglected,—the profanations which he has committed, — and the multiplied and shameful excesses which he has indulged in, through every stage of his

life. The scene is too frightful to look steadily upon: he turns away from it with horror: he envies the condition of the brute beast, because its enjoyments are not disturbed by reflection—that fatal disturber of his repose: and he hurries again into fresh excesses in order to divest himself of thought, and to fly away, as it were, from himself.

But it is not so with the just man. The time that is past presents no unpleasant objects to his view; or rather, the sweetest occupation of his mind is to meditate on the ancient mercies of the Lord, and to trace the ways by which he brought him to the knowledge of his holy law. The recollection even of his past disloyalties does not disturb the serenity of his soul; the tears which it draws from his eyes, are not tears of melancholy sadness, they are tears of interior joy and love, and increase his confidence in him who has been the salvation of his countenance, and his God.

Secondly, the view of present things, or of the figure of this world contribute in an equal degree to produce the same effects as the recollection of the past. My remarks on this part of my subject will convince you that happiness in this life essentially depends on the practice of virtue; and that the same world which excites the passions of its admirers, and consequently involves them in all the perplexities and cares with which the gratification of the passions is attended, is the most pleasing and most consolatory exercise of the faith of the just.

The world, even in its gayest circles, is a state of continual servitude. Its followers cannot live for themselves: its laws must be obeyed, and obeyed with the minutest precision; its happiness is tasted by those only who can hug their chains, and are in love with their bondage. The world is a constant succession of events which by turns

excite in the minds of its votaries the most violent and corroding passions,—hatreds,—envies,—alarms,—apprehensions.—jealousies,—mortifications, and disappointments.——The world is a land of malediction, where even pleasure is armed with a sting, and joy is mixed up with bitterness and sorrow.—The world is a place where hope, the consoling smoother of the troubled mind, is the cause of uneasiness and solicitude; and where the want of hope is the summit of wretchedness and despair: where the objects that are pleasing to day are not pleasing to-morrow, and where disgust and irksomeness are the least intolerable evils that are endured. This is the world, not in any of its obscure recesses, where few of its pleasures are seen and enjoyed, but it is the world in its splendor, such as it is seen and enjoyed by the highest ranks of society,—it is the world deck-

ed out in all the charms which health, prosperity, riches, and pleasures can throw around it. The description is not an imaginary one; it is drawn from truth; and it will be acknowledged to be just by all who have been at any time its followers.

And yet, this is the world in which sinners place their happiness! This is the land which they call their beloved country, and in which they would willingly fix their abode for ever! This is the world which they prefer to the world to come, and to all the great and glorious promises of the gospel! Ah! how just it is that such inconceiveable folly should meet with nothing but unhappiness and disappointment.

The just man, on the other hand, is elevated far above this world, and consequently is far removed from the influence of its inconstancy and caprici-

ousness. He is convinced that there is nothing durable on earth: that riches, and pleasures, and health, are blessings which we may enjoy to-day, and be deprived of to-morrow: that honours and reputation are not worthy of his ambition, since they are not the criterion of merit, but are possessed more frequently by the undeserving than by the truly good and virtuous. He fixes his eyes on God alone, and in submitting himself to the decrees of his Providence, he enjoys a peace and sincerity of mind which is never enjoyed by the admirer of the world. He is happy in the midst of pains and sufferings, as well as in ease and comfort: he is happy in adversity, as well as in prosperity: he is happy in poverty, as well as in opulence: he receives evil things from the hands of the Almighty with the same readiness as he receives good things: in a word, he is as happy under

every occurrence of life, as it is possible for human nature to be in this place of pilgrimage at a distance from God.

These, my beloved, are the delights of virtue: this is the superiority which is possessed by the man of piety over the lovers of the mammon of this perishable world.—But when he looks forward to a future state, what are his sensations? Ah! his soul is on fire:—he is impatient to obtain possession of the object of his hope:—he longs for that happy moment when he shall be united to the Church above, when he shall be associated with the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem, and incorporated with the Elect of God, in that blessed abode where charity alone is their law, and eternity the measure of their felicity.

These consolations,—the only consolations that are not mingled with bitterness and sorrow,—are exclusively

the property of the just man: the sinner is a stranger to them: when *he* looks forward to futurity, he is seized with terror and dismay. The light of faith, which spreads joy and gladness over the soul of the pious Christian, becomes an instrument of the justice of God on the sinner; it destroys every pleasure, and opens an inexhaustible source of anxiety and uneasiness. In vain does he endeavour to banish the thought from his mind. He is constrained to fix his eyes on the unfathomable abyss, and to behold the arm of the Almighty uplifted ready to fall upon him, and to consign him for ever to that place of inexpressible torments.

What a state is this which the sinner chooses for himself! How erroneous are his ideas concerning the nature of true happiness! How dearly does he purchase eternal torments! He seeks for ease and enjoyment in this life, but the

path of the world and of the passions, in which he expects to find it, is more thorny than the path of the gospel: he refuses to suffer for the kingdom of heaven, at the same time that he plainly perceives that what he is accustomed to endure for the kingdom of hell, is a great deal more than what would be sufficient to purchase heaven. Oh! what a treasure do they lose who part with their innocence! They deprive themselves of the consolations of religion, which diffuse such joy over the soul of the just man; and, in addition to this, they deprive themselves of the blessings of grace, without which it is impossible to enjoy any satisfactory pleasure on earth.

2. The blessings which are conferred by grace are manifold; the first of which is an unalterable serenity of mind. The principles of equity, modesty, and rectitude, were implanted in

our nature: we were born, says the apostles, with the law written on our hearts. If virtue be not the primary object of our ambition, we are convinced at least that virtue is our primary duty. In vain does corrupt nature insinuate that the depraved inclinations, which we experience within ourselves, may be followed without a crime, and that our only law is the law of the members; there is an impartial judge, beyond the reach of bribery and corruption, in the interior of our souls, who always declares in favour of virtue, and opposes the demands of self-love; who importunately reminds us of the duty we owe to God, even when we are in the pursuit of our favourite passions, and who makes us wretched even in the midst of splendor and opulence.

Thus it is with the sinner. He is compelled to be his own accuser, and to pass the sentence of condemnation on himself. He is tormented by inces-

sant terrors and alarms. He is unhappy because he cannot conquer his disorderly passions, and he is yet more unhappy because he cannot close his ears to the cries of conscience.

But the just man is a stranger to anxiety and remorse. The trials and afflictions to which he is subjected are light and transient: they pass like a cloud over his soul; they make no impression on it. An unalterable peace reigns in his interior, and within him is to be found that placid tranquillity, that simplicity of heart, that lively confidence, that calm resignation which give him a foretaste of that inexpressible felicity which awaits him in the world to come.

The second blessing which is conferred by grace is love,—even that love which causes the law of the Lord to appear amiable and charming, and the yoke of the Lord easy and light. Ani-

mated by this love, the pious Christian experiences neither difficulty nor pain in fulfilling the most arduous precepts of the gospel: all is easy; all is pleasing: it is with joy that he pardons injuries; with confidence that he suffers corporal afflictions; with pleasure that he mortifies himself; with inward satisfaction that he renounces the vanities of the world; with delight that he applies to prayer; and with complacency that he performs his duties. The more his love is increased the lighter is the yoke; the more he loves, the more perfect is his happiness.

The sinner, on the other hand, fixes his affections on the world; and the effects which this love produces are of a contrary tendency. The more he loves the world, the less satisfaction he enjoys; because the more his love is increased, the more turbulent are his passions, the more eager are his desires,

and the more painful is his solicitude and anxiety. His love is the source from whence all his unhappiness flows; because the more he loves the world, the more ardent he is in the pursuit of pleasure; and finding no real satisfaction in any thing that the world possesses, the more is his disgust, the more is his weariness and disappointment increased.

I am not exaggerating the unhappiness of worldlings, in order to throw a brighter lustre on the charms of virtue. You yourselves may ascertain the truth of my statement. Go up to those men who seem to be the elect of this world, who have every thing at their command, and you will behold that content and happiness never enter their dwelling: look into their interior at a time when calm retirement obliges them to reflect, and you will see that the stings of remorse inflict the most painful wounds

in their souls: ask them what are their sentiments, and they will tell you that the splendor of the world glitters only at a distance, and that the most happy man in this life is the virtuous man.

If there are any of my present auditory who seek their happiness in this world, I appeal to them whether this is not the truth? Have you ever attained to the summit of your wishes? Has there been a time when you could say that your happiness was complete? In certain moments of jollity and excess you may perhaps have exclaimed: *it is good for us to be here:* but how long did it continue? Ah! the illusion speedily vanished, and your former cares and disquietudes resumed their station. At the moment I am speaking to you can you say that you are tranquil and happy? Are you under no apprehensions? Would you consent to live and die in the state in which you now

are? Are you satisfied with the world? Are you unfaithful to the Author of your existence without remorse?

No: my brethren, although the sinner were to hide himself in the bottom of the sea, says the prophet, the Lord will command the serpent of anxiety and remorse, and it shall bite him in that dark abode, (*Amos* ix. 3.); there shall be no peace for the wicked.

Is it not true, likewise, that on those occasions when you were animated by devotion, when you tasted the sweets of heaven at the banquet of our Lord; is it not true that the pleasure you then experienced was satisfactory? did it not fill the vast capacity of your souls? Were you not desirous of a continuance of the same happy transports?

Oh! how incomprehensible are the ways of man! He pants after happiness during his abode in this life, and he

will not walk in the path that leads to it. He is actuated by self-love, and he incessantly opposes his own interests. He beholds the source from whence all his sufferings proceed; and he will not turn away from it. He is disgusted with vanity; and he will not renounce it. He is enamoured of virtue; and he will not embrace it.—How severely will he condemn his folly and madness hereafter, when he shall be summoned before the tribunal of an offended God, to render an account of his works! He will not say: "alas! my days of gladness are over: the world in which I enjoyed so much pleasure and delight is no more: my happiness is at an end, and my sufferings are about to commence." This will not be his language: words of a far different import, according to the testimony of the Spirit of God, will proceed from his lips: "I wearied my-

self," he will say, "in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord I have not known. What hath pride profited me? or what hath the boasting of riches brought me? All these things are passed away like a shadow, (*Wisd.* v.) I might have been numbered among the children of God, but I preferred darkness before light, and have purchased to myself sorrows that will never end."

If, therefore, it be your desire to enjoy peace and happiness on earth, embrace a life of piety. Innocence is the source of true pleasure. Be not deceived by outward appearances. The external delights of the worldling are imbittered by the most painful anguish of mind; and the external mourning of the just man is sweetened by the most enlivening interior consolations. The ark of Israel in the desert was

covered with skins, and exhibited a mean and uncouth appearance. In the same manner, the man of piety not unfrequently appears despicable in the eyes of the world; but were you to look into his interior, you would see that it was covered, like the ark, with the purest gold; you would perceive that it was filled with the glory of the Lord; you would be ravished with the sweetness of the perfumes of prayer, which ascend constantly from the inflamed altar of his heart; you would admire the silence, the peace, the grandeur that reigns there undisturbed; you would be convinced that the Lord had chosen it for his abode, and that it was his delight to dwell therein.

May the description I have given induce you to enter seriously the ways of virtue. You have hitherto enjoyed existence only in part. Your God invites you to return to him. Attend to

his gracious calls: banish wickedness from your hearts, and you will remove the cause of all your woe; you will experience transports of delight which you never experienced before; and these transports will be only a foretaste of that felicity which is prepared for you in the regions of never-ending bliss.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page	Line	
52	21,	for *happy life*, r. *happy death.*
94	15,	for *Behold* r. *Beloved.*
190	22,	for *insults* r. *insult.*
197	8,	for *this applause* r. *their applause.*
203	5,	for *of man* r. *of the man.*
204	5,	for *have the* r. *have his.*
280	text,	after *God*, insert *with thy whole heart.*
289	7,	for *proportiónate* r. *is proportionate.*
317	17,	for *pining* r. *pined.*
309	12,	dele *would.*
325	10,	dele *of.*
444	6,	for *till* r. *at.*
499	10,	for *smoother* r. *soother.*
501	13	for *sincerity* r. *serenity.*

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